

Increasing Gardening in Early Care and Education in Washington State

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BACKGROUND

- Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) promotes child health and well-being
- As part of a national network, Washington State is seeking to scale up farm to ECE efforts across the state
- Gardening is a key component of the Farm to ECE strategy
- Gardening in early care increases access to nutrient-rich foods
- This project focused on building capacity for early learning providers to start and sustain gardens

OBJECTIVES

- Address barriers for early learning providers to start gardens
- Provide resources, trainings, and tools for early learning providers to start and sustain gardens

METHODS

- Researched gardening regulations required by the Washington State Administrative Code (WAC), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Washington State Department of Child, Youth, and Family Services (DCYF)
- Collated rules and regulations into a resource in collaboration with partner agencies
- Synthesized gardening resources and educational materials into a two-hour training
- Compiled gardening in ECE funding opportunities

RESULTS

- 3-page resource that clarifies gardening rules and regulations in ECE
- 2-hour gardening training for early learning providers to earn STARS credits
- Materials for the Farm to ECE website, including funding resources and opportunities for gardening



MATERIALS

Rules & Regulations Resource

GARDENS IN EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Navigating Rules & Regulations

OVERVIEW

School gardens come in all shapes and sizes. They provide young children with wonderful opportunities for hands-on learning. Gardens can range from a few containers on a windowsill to larger, outdoor gardens that produce food for your program. Children benefit in many ways from gardening, including improved social and emotional skills. Garden activities in Early Care and Education (ECE) include planting, harvesting, taste tests, cooking, and more!

When starting or maintaining a garden, it can be confusing to navigate the different guidelines. This resource covers allowable costs for Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimbursements, Washington Administrative Code (WAC) regulations, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines, and Child Care Licensing requirements. The goal of this resource is to clarify the guidelines, and provide helpful resources, in order to support your gardening efforts.

FUNDING YOUR GARDEN

There are many options for garden funding. If you participate in CACFP, the CACFP reimbursement funds can be used for gardens. Applying for grants can give an additional funding boost for getting started.

CACFP Funds Can Be Used for Garden Materials

CACFP meal reimbursement funds can be used to purchase items for gardens such as seeds, fertilizer, watering cans, rakes, and more, as long as the produce grown in the garden will be used as part of the reimbursable meal and for nutrition education activities (such as taste tests).^{2,3}

Funds may not be used to purchase bulk supplies such as topsoil, irrigation supplies, fencing or any type of large equipment such as a tiller or greenhouse.⁴

Contact your Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) CACFP Specialist for more info!

CACFP Funds Can Be Used for Garden-Grown Produce

Programs may be able to grow enough in the garden to meet some of their food needs. If using garden produce in CACFP reimbursable meals, be sure to document the weight and/or volume of the produce and save with your CACFP meal records.⁵

Grant Funding Resources for Getting Started

- [EduGardening.org Grants](#)
- [Growing Spaces Grant List](#)
- [Head Start Garden Grants](#)

Tip! "Big box" stores such as Walmart, Target, Home Depot, and Lowe's may donate garden materials to help you get started. Check out nearby stores and ask about this option!



Funding Resources

Starting & Growing Gardens in ECE

Annual Opportunities

Whole Kids Foundation Garden Grant Program This grant program supports schools and non-profit organizations to turn outdoor spaces into powerful hands-on learning gardens that connect kids with food, spark their curiosity and support classroom curriculum. Grants of \$3,000. Applications due March 11, 2022

National Garden Bureau A national organization dedicated to therapeutic gardening. Eligible applicants and past award recipients include child care centers and schools. Applications open April 2022

Seed Money Garden Grants These grants are offered annually to all types of public food garden projects (youth gardens, community gardens, food bank gardens, etc.) across the country. Grants of \$100-\$1000. Applications due November 15, 2022

Safeway Foundation Community Grant The Safeway Foundations funds organizations that strengthen local communities. Offered twice a year in focus areas of health and education to non-profit organizations. Grants of \$2,500-\$10,000. Applications reviewed twice a year in January and July

The Fruit Tree Planting Foundation This foundation provides high-quality fruit trees and shrubs, organic soil amendments, equipment, planting volunteers, and on-site orchard design work, and more, with the goal of improving the surrounding environment and providing a source of healthy nutrition. Rolling Applications

Funding Opportunities

Garden-Based Early Learning Training

Part 1: Garden-Based Early Learning

Part 2: Starting Your Garden

- Introduction to Gardens in Farm to ECE
- Alternatives to On-Site Gardens

- Planning Your Garden
- Setting up Your Garden



Part 3: Gardening Basics

Part 4: Year-Round Gardening

- Installation
- Soil
- Planting



- Growing Plants
- Maintaining Your Garden
- Harvesting and Cooking



CONCLUSIONS

- Gardening in ECE facilitates early exposure to growing, cooking, and eating fruits and vegetables
- Garden-based learning should be inclusive of diverse communities and offer multiple modalities of engagement, including anti-racist gardening, trauma-informed, and foraging and growing culturally relevant foods
- This upstream strategy for prevention of nutrition-related disease should continue to be supported, funded, and understood as a preventative effort
- Garden-based learning connects young children to nature, culture, and experiential learning