Community Donation Gardening Toolkit

Section 3: Food Safety Practices

Growing and donating fresh produce requires extra attention to issues of food safety. Iowa State University SNAP-Ed staff developed the following list of basic food safety recommendations for donation gardens. We encourage you to print the donation garden food safety infographic (click image at right) to display at your garden.

Food safety practices are extensive, so we provide below an additional set of tools, webinars, and publications developed by ISU Extension and Outreach programs that can guide your food safety procedures in the garden and on the way to the food pantry. We hope these tools are beneficial; please contact us if you would like to see additional resources developed or added to the list.

**Recommendation 1:**
Keep pets and wild animals away from plot.

A tall deer fence at Onawa demonstration garden helps to prevent animals including deer from entering the garden.

A fence built with chicken wire is effective at preventing rabbits, cats, and other small animals from entering the garden and compromising the produce.

**Recommendation 2:**
Use municipal (drinking) water to rinse and remove visible dirt from produce.

(Click image to view video.)
Recommendation 3:
Harvest produce into properly cleaned and sanitized bins using clean utensils. Store tools and sanitize them just before use. Use another bin, a step stool, or even a tarp or blanket to prevent the harvest bins from being directly on the ground.

Recommendation 4:
Wash hands before and after handling produce.

Recommendation 5:
Compost or discard bruised or damaged produce.
Recommendation 6:
Transport produce to food pantry in a clean, covered vehicle.

Recommendation 7:
Personal.
- Restrain hair
- No eating or smoking on facility grounds
- Do not work while sick (fever, diarrhea, etc.)
- No excessive jewelry
- Wear clean clothing

Getting started – Resources from ISU Extension and Outreach
Food Security in Iowa: Best Practices for Food Safety. 2016 ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener webinar from Dr. Shannon Coleman and Susan DeBlieck on food safety practices for donation gardening.
Community Spotlight: Charles Johnson, Master Gardener in Story County

“Well, last year before I started doing actual volunteer hours in the garden, there was orientation and training that [an ISU Extension and Outreach graduate assistant] did with the volunteers. And so, basically they took us through some awareness building about what the possibilities are for having disease organisms or biological organisms and others are on your hands and then your watch and on your ring and all of those kind of things. And so we kind of built that basic awareness and this is why you have to be careful and why you need to wash and why you need to have some cautions. And then actually having them demonstrate to us the processes that they use to clean, to wash the food, and how to mix the solutions properly.”

Growing and Harvesting Vegetables. 2017 ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener webinar excerpt from Dr. Shannon Coleman. Contains background information on food safety, as well as recommended practices for garden vegetables pre-harvest, during harvest, and post-harvest.

Growing Together: Food Safety in Donation Gardens. Infographic (right) developed by Dr. Shannon Coleman overviewing essential food safety practices for donation gardens. The infographic can be downloaded in PDF format and printed for display at your community donation garden, or for distribution to donation gardening participants.

Food Pantry Produce Donations - Grower Information

Make Food Safety a Priority in Your School Garden

On-Farm Food Safety: Cleaning and Sanitizing Guide

On-Farm Food Safety: Food Handling Guide

Additional Food Safety Resources from ISU Extension and Outreach
Community Spotlight:
Laura Klavitter, community gardener in Dubuque County

“And that’s just been a general movement, you know, with the Plant a Row campaign, and some of those other projects of shifting your mindset, so that you can start donating excess produce to others that are food insecure. So, we have been doing that. Last year, we put food on our fence, which was moderately successful, I think most of the time people didn’t realize that it was there and then it started to wilt or go bad. Or certain things just don’t last very long in the sun. The food pantry has been way more successful, because we know that it’s getting refrigerated. And we know that it’s going to families. And those families don’t have to do anything to receive it. And I think that that’s a big part of it, because not everybody has a luxury to spend time in the garden.”