

CHAPTER 7

Garden Safety and Harvest

Garden program educators have found that young gardeners who participate in growing their own fruits and vegetables are more likely to try them and make these healthful foods a regular part of their diet. The ultimate goal of many youth gardening programs today is to have a positive impact on the next generation's nutritional attitudes and behaviors.

Educators have seen how growing and harvesting produce in a youth garden helps young gardeners develop a deep relationship with food. What better way to further solidify and celebrate that relationship than by giving students the opportunity to prepare and taste it themselves? We begin this Chapter with recommendations to make sure planting days are fun for all. Next, we offer safety tips for harvesting produce from your youth garden. Finally, we wrap up the chapter with practical ideas on how to implement cooking demonstrations and tasting activities.

Whether in the cafeteria or a classroom, during an afterschool program, or at a summer camp, providing youth with the opportunity to prepare a simple snack or meal, experience new flavors, and voice their opinions promotes personal growth and discovery. Kids' comfort zones and palates expand with each new food sampled. They also begin to develop a mastery of life-long culinary skills with every carrot chopped and recipe read. By creating an organizational

culture that supports the process of exploring new fresh foods, you can help lay the groundwork for the next generation of engaged and healthy eaters.

This chapter will answer the questions:

- What considerations should be made to maintain safety in the garden?
- What food safety practices do we need to follow to bring in a healthy harvest?
- How can we use the harvest from our garden to improve student nutritional attitudes and behaviors?

Garden Safety

School and youth gardens are great environments for learning and fun. But to keep the garden experience positive and safe, you need to pay attention to some basic guidelines as you plan and later enjoy the garden with kids.

Make sure everyone who plans and works in the garden, including garden coordinators, teachers, adult volunteers, and students, is familiar with safe gardening practices. Before your first trip into the garden (don't attempt this talk while in the garden – the kids will be too excited to listen), hold a safety orientation for kids, as well as a separate informational meeting to let teachers and adult volunteers know not only what the expected practices will be, but also the reasons behind them.



When folks understand how these practices help to keep everyone safe, they are more likely to remember and comply with them.

Below we present some recommendations we have gathered over the years. Many of these are simple common sense, but it's easy to forget or let things slip at times. Children, especially, respond to routine. If fun in the garden always starts and ends with hand washing, they'll be less likely to think of it as a chore and more as a just a regular part of their garden experience. Posting a safety checklist on a garden bulletin board and holding age-appropriate activities for kids relating to garden safety throughout the growing season will help everyone stay on track and keep the school garden experience safe and fun!

The following safety tips will reduce the chances of injuries and illness and help everyone involved in your garden program bring in a healthy harvest.

① Prior to gardening:

- Select a safe site for your garden that is protected from potential hazards such as busy roadways or large bodies of water.
- Test the soil for contaminants such as lead.
- Make sure your water source is safe.

② Staying safe while gardening:

- Plan for adequate adult supervision at all times when youth are in the garden area.
- Record all allergies, including those to food and insects.
- Keep a first-aid kit in the garden area, and inventory first-aid supplies periodically.

- Provide plenty of potable drinking water to prevent kids from getting dehydrated.
- Students should wear closed-toe shoes to protect their feet from cuts and stings. Bare feet, sandals, or flip-flops should not be allowed.
- Students should wear hats and sunscreen while gardening.
- Supply appropriately sized gloves.
- Only healthy students should participate in gardening activities. Any students exhibiting symptoms of illness or with sores or cuts on exposed portions of the hands and arms should be excluded from garden lessons until their health improves.
- All students should wash their hands thoroughly before and after working in the garden.
- Students should not pick and eat unwashed fresh produce while working out in the garden.
- Be aware that exposure to the sap, leaves, and stems of certain plants can cause mild skin irritation or contact dermatitis in sensitive individuals.
- Students should be encouraged to walk on pathways when they are available.

③ Tool and equipment safety:

- Provide tools that are properly sized to the age group using them.
- Show students the safe use and handling of garden tools and equipment. Instruct them to hold tools with sharp edges pointed down and to walk, not run, when carrying them.



- Remind kids to keep tools below the waist when working in the garden.
- Set rakes, hoes, and shovels with their blades and tines facing down when not in use.
- Keep tools out of pathways.
- Make sure there is a secure place to store tools, fertilizers, and pesticides out of reach of students when the garden area is unattended.
- Provide sturdy hangers — at a height kids can reach — for storing tools. You can also place tools in a large garbage can with the handles facing up. If you have a toolshed, keep it clean and organized.
- Coil up hoses after watering.
- Repair or replace broken tools immediately.

Some general safety considerations to keep in mind:

Use rain barrel water safely. Water collected in rain barrels is not potable and may contain harmful bacteria and other contaminants, especially if it is water collected from rooftops. The safest course is to use rain barrel water only for irrigating non-edible crops like native and pollinator plants. If you decide to use water from rain barrels on edibles, have the water tested regularly and clean and sanitize the barrels frequently. And, of course, don't allow student to drink water from rain barrels or garden hoses!

Use fertilizers and pesticides safely. When using any fertilizers or pesticides, even “organic” ones, be sure to read the label completely before use, and follow all instructions and safety precautions. While

organic gardening practices are the safest for gardeners and the garden environment, organic pesticides and fertilizers may still present risks and warrant precautions when used. Also, be sure to assess the safety of any garden home remedies before trying them. Store all pesticides and fertilizers securely out of reach of children.

“This program has allowed students of all abilities the opportunity to learn and work in an outdoor - non pressure environment. Every one is equal in the garden.”

— JO ELLEN PENSINGER
BUSHNELL-PRAIRIE CITY ELEMENTARY, IL



Use manure with caution. While animal manures are time-honored soil builders, they can also harbor pathogens that cause serious illness in humans. Fresh, raw manure is riskiest, and we advise against using it in school or youth gardens, even when plants are not present. Aged and composted manures, while safer, may still contain pathogenic organisms, so the safest course is to forgo their use as well, especially when gardening with young children. If you do decide to use composted manure, we recommend only using commercially composted manure products (not home-composted manure) from a reputable company whose label indicates that it has been treated to be pathogen-free. As an added precaution, consider applying commercially composted manures only in the fall after crops are harvested or at least 120

days before planting an edible crop. Dog, cat, pig, and human manure, even if composted, should never be used.

Compost correctly. While it's convenient to place compost bins near the garden, be sure to locate them where runoff from the bins will not drain into areas where edible plants are growing. If this is difficult to do on your site, consider using a completely enclosed, tumbler-type composter. Keep bins enclosed or bury food wastes in the center of the pile to avoid attracting animals like rats and raccoons to the pile. Don't add cafeteria waste that could contain meat scraps, dairy products, or other foods of animal origin to your compost bin.

We do not recommend adding any animal manures to your compost pile. While "hot" composting (where temperatures in all parts of the pile reach 130 degrees F or higher) will kill many pathogens, it can't be relied on to kill all the harmful bacteria that animal manures may harbor. Hot composting is a batch process that requires stockpiling materials and then building a pile with the correct proportion of green and brown materials to fuel rapid decomposition. Instead, many gardeners practice add-as-you-go "cold" composting – simply piling materials in any proportion as they accumulate and letting them breakdown slowly with time. These cold piles never reach temperatures that will reliably kill off pathogens.

Consider livestock additions carefully.

Keeping animals such as chickens and goats along with a youth garden can add an engaging dimension to a garden program. But their addition requires careful planning

and strict attention to safe practices because of the potential for these animals to transmit serious diseases such as salmonella. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that live poultry not be allowed in schools and daycare settings with children younger than 5 years of age because of this risk. Check with your state Health Department for more information on safe practices for integrating livestock into a school or youth garden setting.

Safe Harvest Practices

Giving kids the opportunity to grow, harvest, and eat delicious and nutritious vegetables, fruits, and herbs fresh from the garden is what school or youth gardening programs are all about. To keep this experience positive and safe, you need to pay attention to some basic harvesting guidelines to help to reduce the possibility of food-borne illnesses. This shouldn't discourage you from allowing children to enjoy all the benefits that come from gardening and eating fresh food. The following suggestions are, with a little planning, generally easy to implement. They'll help everyone involved in your garden program bring in a healthy harvest!

Enlist Healthy Harvesters

Make sure everyone harvesting edibles, both children and adults, is in good health. Anyone who's not feeling well or who has cuts or sores on their hands or arms should refrain from picking produce.

Harvest with Clean Hands

Before picking edibles, all harvesters should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and clean, potable water; then rinse under running





water and dry with a single-use towel. A simple handwashing station can be set up if running water isn't available at your site. Alcohol-based sanitizers are not as good an option for hand cleaning because they are not effective against Norovirus, one of the most common food-borne pathogens. While handwashing is the safest course, if this isn't possible, have harvesters wear single-use, disposable gloves when harvesting. And, of course, washing hands after doing any work in the garden is always part of good garden hygiene.

Gather Produce in Clean Containers

Gather your produce into clean, easily washable, food-grade containers. Recycled five-gallon containers that held foodstuffs are often readily available from your school food service and are easy to keep clean. If you use plastic bags to collect produce, make sure

they are food-grade and don't reuse them. Using potable water, regularly wash (in warm, soapy, water), rinse, dry, and then sanitize all reusable harvesting containers. Also, wash and sanitize any harvesting tools like scissors or knives.

A solution of $\frac{1}{2}$ fluid ounce (1 tablespoon) of unscented household bleach per gallon of water (or $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon bleach per quart of water) can be used as a sanitizing solution. Spray the sanitizing solution onto the cleaned surface; let stand for a least one minute; then air dry or wipe dry with a clean paper towel. As long as you don't exceed the recommended concentration of bleach, you don't need to rinse off the sanitizing solution. Kids can help with the washing of containers, but sanitizing is a task for adults. Store harvesting tools and containers where they will not get re-contaminated after they are cleaned.

Store Produce Safely

Brush off soil or debris on edibles with a clean paper towel before bringing them into your food storage or preparation area. If you choose to wash edibles before storing, be sure to dry them thoroughly with clean paper towels before storing, as moisture will promote the growth of microbes on them. Or you can store unwashed produce in clean, food-grade plastic bags and wash it right before you are ready to prepare or eat it. Berries should always be stored unwashed, then washed right before eating.

Store produce that needs refrigeration at 40 degrees F or less. Fruits and vegetables that don't need refrigeration, like potatoes, tomatoes, onions, and peaches, should be stored in a clean, cool, dry spot.

Wash Produce Correctly

Make sure that the water used for washing produce is potable (drinking water safe). It should also be no more than 10 degrees warmer or colder than the temperature of the produce. This is because if the water temperature is too different from the temperature of the produce itself, pathogens on the surface of fruits and some vegetables can be drawn into them through the stem or blossom end as the produce is washed. If you are washing produce still warm from the garden, use tepid or lukewarm water for washing; use cold water to wash produce that's been refrigerated. Wash all fruits and vegetables under running water, using a clean scrub brush on firm produce like melons, potatoes, and root vegetables.

Get Everyone on Board for Food Safety

It's important that everyone who harvests in the garden, from garden coordinators to adult volunteers to students, be familiar with safe food harvesting procedures. An informational meeting at the beginning of the season can be a good way to let adult volunteers know not only what the expected procedures will be, but also the reasons behind them. When folks understand how these practices help to keep everyone safe from food-borne illnesses, they are more likely to remember and comply with them.

Planning ahead helps streamline safe harvesting practices, making it easier for everyone to carry them out. Post a safe harvest checklist on your garden bulletin board, send reminders about safe harvesting procedures in garden newsletters and emails, and hold some age-appropriate activities for kids relating to food safety so everyone can enjoy delicious and healthful garden eating.

Cooking and Tasting Activities

Although growing fruits and vegetables provides an understanding of their origins and often sways youth to view them in a more positive light, having the opportunity to consume the harvest has a much greater impact on eating behaviors.

Food preparation and tasting activities using garden produce can be as simple or as complex as you want, depending on the materials and time you have available. Just remember, whether you choose to simply try freshly washed greens straight from the garden or prepare a full meal, the most important thing is to make sure you're following standard food safety guidelines in the kitchen just like you did during harvesting. Important food safety guidelines to remember are:

Wash hands. Just as important as at harvest time, this is rule #1! Teach kids how to wash their hands properly and make sure they do so before handling food. Wash hands with soap and warm water for as long as it takes to sing the alphabet song. Dry hands with a clean towel.

Clean your equipment. Before you start to prepare any food, clean all work surfaces (including the sink) with hot soapy water. You can clean vegetable scrub brushes in the dishwasher or by rinsing them in a dilute bleach solution. Also, be sure your utensils and dishes are clean. Always use one cutting board for vegetables and fruits, and a different one for raw meats and fish.

Clean your produce. As mentioned above you'll want to wash produce right before



eating it, rather than when you store it. Wash all fruits and vegetables under running water. Scrub them with your cleaned hands or vegetable scrub brush and dry with paper towels. Avoid using damaged produce. Pre-existing cuts in fruits and vegetables can provide an entry for pathogens.

Simple Tasting Activities

The most basic eating experience is to hold a taste test using only a single ingredient. Here are some ideas to help you plan and conduct a simple tasting event:

- Sample a single whole food item from your garden. Have youth describe as many characteristics of the food as possible, including appearance, flavor, texture, and aroma—make it a full sensory experience and dig deep into descriptive vocabulary!
- To add a little more complexity to the activity, try multiple varieties of a single vegetable. You might have young gardeners taste an array of tomato varieties, for example. Record their

preferences on a table, graph, or chart, and use comparative language to describe distinctions between varieties.

- Compare a raw vegetable straight from your garden with its pickled, roasted, sautéed, steamed, or grilled counterpart. Connect to science topics by researching food chemistry or compare the effects of different cooking techniques on taste and texture.
- Explore the differences between a vegetable fresh from your garden and one from a grocery store. Compare where and how they were grown. Investigate how far your store-bought item traveled to get from its point of origin to your classroom. Was it processed or packaged a specific way (canned, frozen, etc.)? Could these differences be responsible for any variations in taste, appearance, or smell?
- Have a themed taste test! Feature seasonal produce (pumpkin seeds in October for Halloween, potatoes around St. Patrick's Day) or vegetables associated with a specific country or historical era you are studying in class.



As you conduct your taste tests, remember that food tastings should be inclusionary, not exclusionary. Create a judgment-free atmosphere where all preferences are valid. Youth should not feel pressured to try or say they like something, nor should they be faulted for disliking something or deciding not to partake.

To encourage youth to go into the activity with an open mind, provide them with the language to respectfully discuss their food preferences. For example, rather than saying



“I hate it” or “This is gross!” encourage youth to say “No, thank you,” “This isn’t for me,” or simply “I don’t like it.” Also, introduce the concept of a “Try a Bite” (or “Try a Sip” if you happen to be making a smoothie, soup, etc.) as a way to encourage youth participation. After you take your one Try a Bite, you can choose to take more bites if you like it or say “no thanks” and be done with the taste test. Also encourage students not let their preferences influence others. FoodCorp staff use the fun phrase “Don’t Yuk My Yum” to encourage kids to be accepting when food preferences vary.

Make sure to provide time to share opinions and collect feedback after a tasting activity. You can do this informally or use more formal measures such as having youth draw tallies or place stickers or post-it notes in a specific category on the poster to cast their vote. Give them a spectrum of options that they can choose between to express their preferences such as:

- Loved It, Liked it, Tried it
- I liked it, It was OK, No Thanks
- Thumbs Up, Thumbs in the Middle, Thumbs Down



When youth vote, hand out **I VOTED** or **I TRIED IT** stickers.

After you’ve collected your younger gardeners’ input, give voice to their choice. Share the results of the taste test in an organizational newsletter (include a recipe) or

during announcements/homeroom the next day. Display the posterboard where results were tallied in the hallway or the lunchroom until the next taste test, then compare the results.

As a conclusion to the activity, remind youth that their taste buds might take time to adjust to a new flavor or food. Scientists say people need to try something as many as eight times before they grow to like it! Encourage students to try it again in the future and, if possible, arrange for another tasting event.

Cafeteria Taste Tests

In school settings, taste tests can be offered in a classroom setting or you can try approaching your school’s cafeteria staff to see if they would be interested in hosting a school-wide taste-testing event. Remember that they will probably need significant lead time to make this happen. Whereas in a classroom you might do a spontaneous taste test or only plan for one a day or two in advance, cafeteria-based taste tests using garden produce require additional coordination with food service staff. If you are looking at increasing the size and scope of your taste test programs, it may be helpful to establish a garden leadership committee to specifically plan and implement the events.

Begin by approaching your school’s kitchen manager, who may then contact your district food service director to discuss the possibility of facilitating a taste test using garden produce. You will want to begin by discussing your school district’s regulations related to fresh foods. School districts often have different protocols and expectations when it comes to using locally or school-grown

produce. Understanding your food service department's food safety standards is key to making a garden-based taste test a reality.

Once you understand the process, explore your food service staff's capacity for preparation. Keep in mind that school kitchens are busy places and vary site by site. Some kitchens and school food programs are based on a heat-and-serve model and might not have the same equipment and capacity as a kitchen where the staff prepares food from scratch. Does your kitchen have the necessary equipment, as well as staff capacity and knowledge, to prepare a taste test item from the garden? Will they also have to buy additional supplies, such as tasting cups or plastic forks? What is the purpose of a taste test? To expose students to new fruits and veggies? To promote currently unpopular lunch items? To highlight the school's productive garden? The answers to these questions will likely dictate what you feature from your garden and even how the item is prepared. Depending on when this conversation happens, it might also influence what you decide to grow in your garden.

After your cafeteria staff is on board, next consider the best way to distribute a taste test item while causing the least amount of disruption to the normal schedule. Ask yourself what a typical lunch period looks like at your school. Would it be most streamlined to set up a special tasting table at the end of the hot food line so that students can grab a sample as they walk by? What about youth that bring lunch from home? Will you ask them to come up individually (by table? by grade?) or will you deliver a sample to them? Or perhaps it's best to set up your tasting table elsewhere,

in a location that runs less risk of becoming congested. Will you have enough for all grade levels? Or will you need to take turns? Will you need volunteers to assist in this endeavor or will food service staff, teachers, or garden educators be available to manage the event? Carefully planning to best accommodate staff and students will contribute greatly to the success of your event.

Promoting the event to drum up excitement will also improve your event and its overall impact. Since you are investing resources in a school-wide taste test you want your students to know what's happening and be excited about participating. For example, you can have students make signs for the hallways that feature the date of the taste test and information about what you'll be trying; include pictures, drawings, fun facts, and nutritional information. Alternatively, create a series of signs that only hint at what you'll be trying — each one another clue in a taste test mystery! Another option is to take to the airways and use morning announcements to spread the word. Make sure parents also know about any tasting events. Mark taste test days on a school calendar and disseminate information via a newsletter or school Facebook page.

Be sure to find out ahead of time if any youth have food allergies. Modify recipes to feature alternative ingredients; for example, you could make a smoothie using juice, oat milk, or soy milk instead of cow's milk. Offer alternate foods for students to sample if someone is allergic to the food planned for a single-ingredient taste test but be careful to avoid cross-contamination.



On the day of the taste test, be sure to remind students during morning announcements or homeroom what they'll be trying and what a taste test looks like.

Cooking Activities

If time and resources allow, you can expand upon the tasting activities by hosting a cooking demonstration or allowing youth to prepare a recipe using your garden-fresh harvest. A successful cooking activity requires careful planning and preparation. You will need to borrow or purchase special tools to help with your preparation. You want to choose your recipe to match the skill and maturity level of your audience. Cooking activities will also vary greatly depending on the number of youth participating, the number of adults available to supervise and assist, and the space and supplies available. Here are a few tips for planning a successful cooking activity:

- Check your organization's fire codes before bringing any portable kitchen equipment, like electric frying pans, into a classroom. Additionally, be sure to find out if your school has any specific food policies, such as a ban on peanut products, or regulations pertaining to allowable cleaning products.
- The first time you lead a cooking activity be sure to explain what certain kitchen implements are and how to use them safely. For younger gardeners, emphasize that everything from a measuring cup to a zester is a tool, not a toy. Consider having a clear zero-tolerance policy for fooling around with knives, blenders, etc.
- If a single individual is running the cooking activity or when working with young children, it can be helpful to organize all your implements and ingredients on a single table that everyone can see. Call each child up one by one to complete a



single step in the recipe. While students are waiting to be called up, consider having them prepare another part of the recipe using a kid-safe tool, pass out serving plates and utensils, or complete a related worksheet, so that they stay engaged in the cooking activity. Not only does this give everyone the opportunity to participate in an orderly and manageable fashion, but everyone can also observe the full process.

- For older youth who have cooking experience, or when more than one adult is available to help conduct an activity focused on a multi-step recipe, you might try assigning each youth a specific job, such as chopping onions or prepping garlic. If possible, have them gather their own tools, complete their task, and clean up their area. Remember that certain food prep jobs will be highly sought after (e.g., anything involving a grater), and assigning responsibilities can go from a simple procedure to one that is emotionally charged. If you lead regular cooking activities, create a chart of jobs that kids can simply rotate through so everyone has a chance to experience the range of tasks.

If you have the budget to invest in additional ingredients (and enough kitchen equipment), consider dividing youth into small teams and having each group complete the same recipe independently. Depending on the yield of your recipe, you may want to halve or quarter it. As with the previous example, this strategy works best when you have multiple adults available to help and youth who have some experience with cooking projects.

No matter how you choose to conduct a food preparation activity, have students participate

Basic Equipment Needed for Cooking Demonstrations

Below, are suggestions for a well-stocked food preparation kit:

- Cutting boards
- Graters (zesters)
- Mixing bowls of various sizes
- Lemon squeezer
- Measuring cups + spoons
- Garlic mincer
- Knives (crinkle cutters)
- Peelers
- Spoons
- Blender
- Spatula
- Electric griddle
- Whisk
- Pots and pans
- Tongs
- Paper towels

Store all your cooking supplies in a large plastic container and include a list of every item you have, so you'll know if anything is misplaced.

in the cleaning up process. Make sure any food scraps are thrown out (or better yet, composted!), surfaces are wiped down, and kitchen implements are cleaned and put away.



Looking for Assistance in your Community

If you're still feeling unsure about independently facilitating a cooking or tasting activity or feel you don't have either the supplies or budget to make these activities a reality, reach out to the immediate and wider community for support. Approach parents and community volunteers, especially those who lend a hand in the garden, about coming in to help manage an activity.

You may also want to contact staff from your local Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-ED). SNAP-ED is a national program individually hosted by state agencies and local implementing agencies. In addition to providing educational materials, they often employ Nutrition Educators to connect with schools that have moderate to high free-and-reduced lunch rates to facilitate taste tests and short nutritional lessons. Find one in your area and coordinate special monthly visits.

Talk to local restaurants and see if any kitchen staff might be willing to spend time with your gardeners. Keep in mind that professional chefs and restaurant cooks might need guidance on how to communicate with the age group of youth.

Other Ways to Use the Harvest

Here are some other ideas for making the most of your food garden's bounty.

School Meals

For school gardens, another idea for increasing your students' exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables is to integrate garden produce into the cafeteria lunch line and

salad bar. Depending on the size of your garden, you might produce enough food on a consistent basis to consider regularly integrating it into school meals. Or perhaps you can just plan one or two special harvest lunches. Keep in mind that most school gardens are used as educational gardens, not production gardens, because the garden size needed to produce enough food for the school meal service is significant. Featuring student-grown and harvested produce in the cafeteria is a wonderful way to get youth excited about vegetables.

“One parent reported, ‘My daughter just loves the garden. Sometimes, it’s the only reason she comes to school.’”

— GEMMA SAGE

ROOSEVELT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL, DC



Planning this type of arrangement will require very close coordination with school and district food service staff. Keep in mind the extra labor (and therefore cost) required when it comes to preparing whole, fresh foods. Furthermore, in some kitchens, incorporating these fresh items might be hindered by lack of supplies/equipment and scratch cook training.

Be as realistic and specific about what you can provide (salad greens and cherry tomatoes on a weekly basis, carrots once month, etc.). Kitchens are busy places. Coordinating food deliveries and planning meals is a complicated business, so make sure you can provide the quantity of the product you promise on the day you promise.



Think ahead during these most bountiful months. The summer is a great time to process and preserve large harvests that might otherwise go to waste. You might be able to coordinate with the food service staff working at a summer meal site to package and freeze your school's berries (the future perfect topping on a yogurt parfait) or to puree and freeze summer squash (the makings a delicious soup).

Potentially, providing produce to your school's cafeteria can help support the garden financially too. The district may be able to purchase fruits and vegetables the way they would from any other vendor. This could become a way to sustain the garden program.

Take Food Home

If food tasting and preparation during programming time is not possible, don't despair; it is always nice to compensate your hardworking gardeners with produce from the garden to take home. Young gardeners and their families both get to enjoy it. For

maximum benefit, make sure to send home prepping instructions and recipes as well.

CSA or School Farmers' Market

By creating a CSA or hosting a school farmers market, students can provide their community with access to fresh fruits and vegetables, raise some funds, and increase learning as they engage in planning, planting, preparing, and selling their produce.

Donation/Food Distribution

One final option for using your harvest is to donate produce to a food bank for distributing to the wider community. The more involved the students are in the planning process, the more empowered they will become about addressing community food issues. Let students help decide where produce should go — you can give them a range of options, or have them research opportunities independently. Either way, you can use your garden to teach students about bigger issues such as food justice and equity and discuss hunger and health issues in your community or surrounding communities.

In Summary

While coordinating cooking and tasting events takes careful planning, giving young gardeners (and the wider school community) the opportunity to consume their harvest is an important component for any garden program that hopes to impact youth eating behaviors. The first step in this process is to ensure that all produce is harvested and processed safely. Once that is accomplished, there are many ways to facilitate tasting experiences. Explore how you can work within your organization to find the strategies that work best for your program.