



## **Growing Garden's Official Response to Lead Concern in School Gardens**

Portland, Oregon; August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016

As a leader in urban agriculture and education, Growing Gardens has consistently addressed the concern of lead in all of our programs. From school gardens in our Youth Grow Program, home gardens across the Portland metro area and within our correctional facility gardens across the State of Oregon, we take this issue seriously and are committed to providing safe growing environments for our communities.

As of August 19<sup>th</sup>, Portland Public Schools has decided on a temporary recommendation to not eat school garden produce. We understand that this is a *temporary* hold and that, after more water tests and any necessary spigot replacements, school garden produce will be deemed safe to eat again. We are urging the district to complete this process as soon as possible, so that we can return to serving school garden produce.

Our understanding from lead experts is that ingesting high-lead content *soil* by not properly washing produce that has been grown in lead contaminated soil is the main health concern. An Oregon State University [publication](#) states that plants do not readily accumulate lead in edible parts of plants. In fact, on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, the [Oregon Health Authority](#) stated that: "Watering a school or community garden with lead-containing water is OK but test soil for lead."

We test all of the school garden soil prior to beginning any project. After PPS released findings and concerns of schools with elevated lead levels, we retested all of the school garden soil and found that zero school garden soil tests were elevated. To be especially cautious, Growing Gardens has established the attached protocols that address the concern of potential lead in school gardens, and will continue to follow these once PPS lifts the temporary hold on eating school garden produce.

Many schools have completed water testing. At schools which have [completed tests](#), and where results show that the water is safe, we would like to continue using school garden produce.

School gardens play an important role in promoting healthy eating, teaching science, and engaging children in hands-on learning. We will take this opportunity to work with students on educational opportunities in the garden while we patiently wait for PPS to continue their lead mitigation work. We plan on utilizing the school gardens for educational sessions on botany, healthy ecosystems, life-cycles, healthy soils, as well as using the garden to teach math, science, social studies, art and other disciplines. We are also developing a partnership with Professor Molly Kile at the OSU College of Public Health to engage students in soil tests and incorporate science learning into the school garden.

We have a strong partnership with Portland Public Schools, which has been at the forefront of offering fresh, local fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria and supporting school gardens. Once any water spigots are fixed that need to be, we look forward to continuing to build the school garden movement to improve the health and education of students.

## Growing Gardens Protocol for Lead Prevention at School Gardens

- Build raised-bed gardens and fill with fresh soil from a source that tests for lead.
- Test garden soil for lead levels when we start a partnership.
- Annually add new compost to garden beds.
- If a school's drinking water has tested high during district lead tests, retest garden soil for lead levels.
- If soil test comes back with an acceptable range deemed safe by [Oregon State Extension Office](#), continue to use the school garden, following these protocols.
- Always flush hose until the water runs cold. Flush water over an area of garden that contains non-edible plants.
- Do not let kids drink out of the hose.
- Always scrub then peel root vegetables.
- Always wash vegetables with lead-free water and follow Oregon Department of Education's [guidelines on garden harvesting and washing](#).
- Children always wash hands with soap and water before eating.
- We will honor parents' decisions about their child's participation in eating garden produce.

## Research

Research articles that we have relied on for guidance:

- Oregon Health Authority statement on school and community gardens: <https://twitter.com/OHAOregon/status/767829882046820352>
- Oregon Health Authority factsheet: "Lead and Drinking Water": <https://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyEnvironments/DrinkingWater/Monitoring/Documents/health/lead.pdf>
- Oregon State University, "Evaluating and Reducing Lead Hazards in Gardens and Landscapes" <http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/19844/ec1616-e.pdf>
- Urban Gardening, "Managing the Risks of Contaminated Soil": <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/121-a326/>
- "Lead levels of edibles grown in contaminated residential soils: a field survey": <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969703004777>

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