

# SERVING LOCAL FOODS

## In North Carolina Child Care Centers

### Guidance on Food Preparation and Gardening



#### 1. Sinks for Preparing Fresh Produce

**Q. What are the specific requirements for food preparation equipment related to fresh produce?**

**A.** Specific requirements are determined by individual health departments based on the amount and type of produce to be prepared as well as the existing space in the licensed Child Care kitchen. Department recommendations regarding the use of colanders may vary based on the volume of produce, type of sink and air gap in place.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Centers interested in serving fresh produce, should first contact their local Environmental Health Specialist and request a visit to determine if additional space or sink requirements are needed.

The following items may be assessed:

- Dish washing activities
- Is sink free and available during the time produce will be prepared
- Where will produce be stored prior to handling, is refrigeration space adequate
- Is kitchen permitted for single service or multi- use utensils
- Cleaning and sanitizing procedures for sinks and drainboards used for processing fresh produce.
- Is an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) needed for handling fresh produce
- Does the sink have an air gap
- What type of produce will be prepared
- What type of preparation is required (washing, cutting, draining, cooking, cold storage, cooling)
- What is the volume of produce prepared in a given day/time frame
- In some situations, an appropriately sized colander may be approved for washing limited quantities of produce
- Does the center have a full kitchen or receiving kitchen
- Are cutting boards specific to produce available
- Is preparation taking place in the classroom
- Will preparation be supervised

[See applicable rules:](#)

*.2810(c) A separate food preparation sink with drainboards or countertop space of adequate size shall be required when a plan review indicates that separate facilities are needed based on volume and preparation frequency.*

#### **Approval of Construction and Renovation Plans**

*.2802(a) Plans drawn to scale and specifications for new child care centers shall be submitted to the local health department for review and approval prior to initiating construction. Plans drawn to scale and specifications for changes to building dimensions, kitchen specifications, or other modifications to existing child care centers shall also be submitted to the local health department for review and approval prior to construction. Plans drawn to scale and specifications for prototype “franchise” or “chain” child care centers shall be submitted to NC DHHS, Division of Public Health, Environmental Health Section, Children’s Environmental Health Branch. When requested by an operator of a center or by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the local health department shall visit or inspect an existing or proposed center, within 30 days of the request, to determine compliance with this Section.*

## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

.2810(c) may require the addition of a vegetable prep sink in child care center kitchens based on preparation, volume, and frequency. Having a vegetable prep sink may alleviate some of the problems encountered during inspections.

A center that has an approved 2 or 3 compartment kitchen sink properly plumbed could use one of the compartments for washing produce. Any sink vats and drainboards used for washing fruits and vegetables would have to be properly washed and sanitized prior to use. No other washing, soaking or drying activities should be occurring in other sink compartments or on the drainboards of the sink due to the risk of cross-contamination from splash or drip.

It is recommended to post instructions by the sinks indicating proper sanitizing and usage procedures. Colanders should be used to keep produce off the bottom and sides of the sinks. Kitchen staff, including any floaters or temporary workers, must be properly trained to work in the kitchen with produce.

As a best practice, a logbook should be kept and made available for inspection to record information regarding the source and type of produce and refrigerator temperatures.

For more information on sinks and air gaps, click [here](#).

## 2. Preparation of raw produce



**Q. Are there any additional rules or specific guidance about food preparation specific to raw vegetables and fruits, whether they are grown in a child care center garden or purchased locally?**

**A. Guidance provided** in the Federal Food Code states that once **cut**, leafy greens, tomatoes, and melons are considered potentially hazardous foods. Centers should be aware that these foods must be properly handled and stored in refrigeration once cut. Please consult with your Environmental Health Specialist for **additional** guidance.

[See applicable rules:](#)

*.2807(a) In child care centers, the preparation of food shall take place only in the approved facilities or space equipped as required in Rule .2810 of this Section.*

*(b) Food shall be prepared with the least possible manual contact, with utensils, and on surfaces that have been cleaned, rinsed, and sanitized prior to use in order to prevent cross-contamination.*

*(c) Food contact surfaces and utensils shall be cleaned and sanitized after preparing raw foods, prior to preparing ready-to-eat foods and after any interruption of operations in which contamination may have occurred.*

*(d) Raw fruits and raw vegetables shall be washed with potable water before being cooked or served.*

## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

Cut leafy greens are identified under federal and state food code as products requiring time and temperature control for safety. Cut greens support the growth of pathogens and require refrigeration to slow microbial growth. Refrigerators, both commercial and domestic, should maintain a temperature of 41°F or below. (Childcare Rules require 45°F.)



### 3. Child Care Gardens

**Q. Are there any rules that prohibit onsite child care gardens, other than specific instances noted in the rules?**

**A.** No, however we offer a few suggestions:

- It is strongly recommended that gardens not be planted adjacent to building foundations because of the possibility of termite and pesticide treatments to the foundation soil and lead-based paint on exterior pre-1978 building components.
- Materials used in the construction of garden borders should be rated by the manufacturer as non-hazardous and safe for use in gardens. A useful website is:  
[https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/270\\_0.pdf](https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/270_0.pdf)
- Be mindful to harvest ripened fruits and vegetables to prevent them from falling to the ground and attracting scavenging animals that can be difficult to control and may spread disease.
- Children must wash their hands after any outdoor activity, which includes gardening.
- Gardens should not be placed over septic drain fields.

**B. Are there specific restrictions to fertilizers or pesticides used in child care gardens?**

**A.** Although not prohibited, the use of pesticides in gardens is not recommended for licensed child care programs. Read labels to ensure that if used, children can safely help with harvesting unwashed produce. If fertilizers or pesticides are used, they must be stored according to the storage requirements of 15A NCAC 18A.2820.

#### **ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

Pesticides & fertilizers need to be locked. Read warnings on containers.  
Toxic plants must be inaccessible to children. A list of toxic plants is online here:  
[https://www.ncpoisoncontrol.org/-/media/nc-poison-center/documents/plant-brochure\\_final.pdf](https://www.ncpoisoncontrol.org/-/media/nc-poison-center/documents/plant-brochure_final.pdf)

[See applicable rules:](#)

*.2831 (d) Only those pesticides which have been registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall be used. Pesticides shall be used in accordance with the directions on the label and shall be stored in a locked storage room or cabinet separate from foods and medications. Pesticides shall not be applied or used when children are present in the area.*

*.2831(i) Grass, fruit and vegetable gardens, vines on fences, and other vegetation needs to be maintained in a manner which does not encourage the harborage of vermin.*

*.2803(b) Children shall wash hands upon arrival at the child care center; after each diaper change or visit to the toilet; before eating meals or snacks; before and after water play; after outdoor activity; and after handling animals or animal cages. Except for diapering and before eating meals or snacks, hand sanitizing products may be used in lieu of handwashing while children are outdoors if hands are washed upon returning indoors.*

*.2820(b) All corrosive agents, pesticides, bleaches, detergents, cleansers, polishes, any product which is under pressure in an aerosol dispenser, and any substance which may be hazardous to a child if ingested, inhaled, or handled shall be kept in its original container or in another labeled container, used according to the manufacturer's instructions and stored in a locked storage room or cabinet when not in use. Locked storage rooms and cabinets shall include those which are unlocked with a combination, electronic or magnetic device, key, or equivalent locking device. These unlocking devices shall be kept out of the reach of a child and shall not be stored in the lock. Toxic substances shall be stored below or separate from medications and food. Any product not listed above, which is labeled "keep out of reach of children" without any other warnings shall be kept inaccessible to children when not in use, but is not required to be kept in locked storage. The product shall be considered inaccessible to children when stored on a shelf or in an unlocked cabinet that is mounted a minimum vertical distance of five feet above the finished floor.*

#### 4. Composting



**Q. Are child care centers allowed to compost, as long as they follow rule 15A NCAC 18A .2831?**

**A.** Yes, composting is allowed. Composting areas must be covered and maintained to prevent attracting or encourage breeding of rodents or vermin. Worm bins, often used to assist in composting, must also be kept covered.

[See applicable rules:](#)

*.2831 (b) Effective measures shall be taken to keep uncontained insects, rodents, and other vermin out of the child care centers and to prevent their breeding or presence on the premises. Traps shall only be placed in areas inaccessible to children.*

*(h) Any composting areas shall be covered and maintained to prevent attracting rodents or vermin. Worm bins shall be kept covered.*

#### 5. Preparing fresh produce in the classroom



**Q. Are there any restrictions to preparing fresh produce in the classroom, providing the produce is properly washed in the kitchen before being brought to the classroom? For example, if the cook washed an assortment of apples in the kitchen and sent them to the classroom, could the teacher cut them up for a taste test in the classroom?**

**A.** If the classroom is equipped with an approved food preparation area and handwashing procedures are followed, fresh produce may be prepared in the classroom. The food preparation area must include a food preparation hand wash sink, cleanable countertop space, and if needed, refrigeration.

[See applicable rules:](#)

*.2801 (10) "Food Preparation" means the handling of foods or utensils in the preparation of meals, including opening and closing of baby bottles, baby food jars and cereal boxes, as well as the opening and closing of any other food items intended for the assembly of ingredients for human consumption.*

**NOTE:** Utensils, such as a bowl or knife, would be returned to the kitchen for proper wash, rinse, and sanitizing. Also, adequate counter space would be required for preparation in this area. If the classroom is not equipped with an approved food preparation area, produce could be prepared in the kitchen and sent in individual containers to the class for educational activities.

**Produce may not be washed in the food preparation handwash sink or other handwash sinks.**

*.2810(f) If food is prepared in a classroom, a food preparation area shall be provided. Water from a handwash lavatory shall not be used to prepare formula, mix dry cereals, or other foods. Toy cleaning and sanitizing may also be conducted in this food preparation area. This food preparation area shall contain an easily cleanable countertop and a lavatory and, when needed, adequate refrigeration. The food preparation counters, bottle warming equipment if used, food and food contact surfaces shall be out of reach of children and the following shall apply:*

- (1) all equipment shall be cleaned at least daily. Warming equipment shall be cleaned and sanitized as required in Rule .2812 of this Section;*
- (2) after each use, all multi-service articles provided by the center shall be cleaned and sanitized in the child care center kitchen;*
- (3) single-service articles shall be handled as required in Rule .2814 of this Section; and*
- (4) counter, shelf or cabinet space shall be provided for food storage. Food supplies shall be stored in accordance with Rule .2806 of this Section.*

*.2824 (a) In child care centers, floors and floor coverings of all food preparation, food storage, utensil-washing areas, toilet rooms, and laundry areas shall be constructed of nonabsorbent, easily cleanable material.*

*.2826 (a) In child care centers, all rooms and enclosed areas shall be lighted by natural or artificial means. Lighting shall be capable of illumination to at least 50 foot-candles at work surfaces in kitchens and diaper changing areas and at children's work tables, desks and easels. Lighting shall be capable of illumination to at least 10 foot-candles of light, at 30 inches above the floor, in all other areas, including storage rooms. Light fixtures in all areas shall be kept clean and in good repair. Shielded or shatterproof bulbs shall be used in food preparation, storage, and serving areas and in all rooms used by children.*

*.2827 (d) Employees with a communicable disease or a communicable condition shall be excluded from situations in which transmission can be expected to occur, in accordance with Communicable Disease Control Measures under 10A NCAC 41A .0200. Any employee with boils, sores, burns, infected wounds or other potentially draining lesions on exposed skin shall bandage the affected area to eliminate exposure to drainage. If such bandaging obstructs handwashing or if the exposure to drainage cannot be eliminated, then the employee shall be excluded from food preparation and caregiving while the condition exists.*