

Important information

Growing Food at Work – UNISON Cymru Wales

The ownership of any produce grown in the workplace:

- Anything grown on a site is the property of the landowner or person/organisation who has a lease or licence agreement with the landowner.
- **As a manager to check the organisation's insurance** to ensure that they are covered for the food that they grow that may be consumed by a member inside or outside of their group or organisation.
- Anyone in a workplace growing food should **agree what happens to that produce before any food is grown.**
- **Write a formal agreement** between the food growers and the landowner/lease or licence holder. That way everyone is clear about expectations before a project begins. If food is for a particular group e.g. clients/service users/staff only, then this should be stipulated in the agreement.
- **Make and display clear bilingual signage** that says "Please note this produce is specifically for XX". If the site is in a public area then it is left to the good will of passers-by to respect this.

Isla Horton from Grow Cardiff gives this example:

"Most community groups we have worked with understand that if the food they grow is in a public or semi-public site, then they anticipate that members of the community will want to share that food and are open to people taking it as it grows.

We are currently running a community garden outside a GP surgery in a busy part of the city. The site is completely open 24/7 and we grow food there. So far, we have had to encourage people to take the food grown and there has been no theft, vandalism, etc.

There may also be the question of what to do with excess food, particularly in late summer/autumn, again this should be discussed with the group.

No-one wants to see food go to waste and often there are local schemes where excess food can be redistributed to a food pantry, food hub or similar community project."

Also see: www.farmgarden.org.uk for more information.

Issues of health and safety, food and plant allergies:

- **Ask a manager to discuss with your insurer and your group.** Every site should have a robust risk assessment which addresses how they will manage issues like food allergies, poisonous plants and other health & safety risks.
- **Follow the risk assessment** before every planting and harvesting session.
- **Be aware of poisonous garden plants and potential food allergies.** Many people are allergic to chillies. Rhubarb leaves are poisonous. Occasionally people are allergic to strawberries, brassicas (kale, cabbage) and alliums (onions, garlic).
- **Bare earth can attract cats who use it like a litter tray.** Check outdoor beds for excrement before planting or harvesting.
- **Acute allergy to bee stings should be considered.** If you start growing food, particularly if you are growing flowers to attract pollinators, you are likely to increase the number of bees coming to an area.
- **Vulnerable adults or children may be at risk** if they do not have the capacity to know if a plant/food growing is harmful to them.
- **Establish group 'rules'** before anyone helps themselves to food and set these rules out clearly, including how to try any of the food
- **Ensure that all food is labelled** clearly and your bilingual signage clearly states “anyone consuming this food does so at their own risk”

Isla Horton from Grow Cardiff told us:

“Other than nuts, I have not come across any acute allergies to plants/foods grown in a typical community garden.

I would definitely avoid any nuts or chilli plant growing, even in a well-managed site. I once had a terrible experience where a young man said, 'Oh miss, I love peppers' and before I could stop him, he reached out, picked, and ate a whole chilli!

These issues can be worked through, and I would encourage anyone who wants to grow food not to think these issues are insurmountable or that food growing is too dangerous for a group to venture into.

In my experience local authorities or health boards who have little experience of food growing can throw all sorts of obstacles in the path of would be growers as they think the risk is too high. Here, growers need to show that they have a thorough plan and have thought through how to mitigate against any potential risks. Think of every possible risk or objection that someone might have to food growing on a site.”