

Lesson 3

The Great Garden Grab: What's Safe to Pick?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Explain why fallen fruit should not be eaten directly from the ground.
2. Identify safe harvesting practices for fruits and vegetables.
3. Demonstrate proper handling techniques when harvesting edible plants.
4. Understand how food can become contaminated during harvest.

Materials Needed

- Visual aids: Clean vs. contaminated produce images
- Samples or images of fruits and vegetables still growing on the plant and fallen on the ground
- Gloves, baskets, scissors/pruners (for demo or role-play)
- Garden journal or notebook for each student
- “The Great Garden Grab: What’s Safe to Pick?” worksheet
- Optional: Access to a school garden for practice

Lesson Activities

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Provocation Question:** “Why do you think we’re not supposed to eat apples we find on the ground?”
- **Discussion Starter:** Talk about bacteria, animals, dirt, and how fallen fruit can be contaminated, even if it looks okay.
- **Visual Aid:** Show pictures comparing a clean fruit picked from a tree and one fallen on the ground.

2. What Can Go Wrong? (10 minutes)

- **Scenario Discussion:** Show or describe scenarios (e.g., fruit in compost, picked with dirty hands, dropped on the ground).
- Ask students: “What might go wrong here?” and “What could we do instead?”



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Key Points:

- Do not eat produce that has fallen on the ground unless it has been washed and inspected by an adult.
- Always harvest with clean hands and tools.
- Use baskets or containers, don't carry food in dirty pockets or bags.

3. Hands-On Activity: Harvest Safety Role-Play (20 minutes)

Create a mock garden with 3–4 stations (tables, areas of the garden, or boxes with props). Each station simulates a different harvesting scenario. Use plastic fruits/veggies, paper cutouts, or real garden produce if available. Students will rotate stations:

Example Stations

Station 1: Fresh on the Vine

- Place a “clean” fruit or vegetable on the plant (or simulate this).
- No visible dirt, not touching the ground
- Goal: Practice clean harvesting using gloved hands or sanitized scissors.
- Decision Prompt: “Is this safe to harvest?”

Station 2: Fallen Fruit

- Show a fruit on the ground or touching dirt.
- May have fake bruises or labels like “has been on the ground.”
- Decision Prompt: “Can we pick this up and eat it?”

Station 3: Dirty Hands

- Students pretend they haven't washed their hands. Offer gloves or simulate tool sanitizing.
- Prompt: “How can we safely harvest now?”

Station 4: Bug Damage or Moldy Produce

- Use stickers or paper “mold spots” or “bug bites.”
- Prompt: “Is this produce safe to harvest or should we leave it?”



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Student Instructions

1. Rotate through each station in small groups.
2. Look at the harvest situation and discuss whether the produce is safe or unsafe to pick.
3. Use clean tools or gloves to “harvest” only when appropriate.
4. Record your decisions and observations in your Garden Journal. For example: “The tomato was on the ground and had a bruise. I decided not to harvest it.”

Encourage Discussion

- Ask: “What might happen if someone eats this without washing it?”
- Follow up: “Why do we avoid harvesting or picking food from the ground?” or “How can using tools help keep food clean?”

4. Optional Math Integration (5–10 minutes)

- Count and sort harvested produce by condition (clean vs. dirty, ripe vs. fallen).
- Create a simple bar graph of their results.

5. Conclusion and Review (5 minutes)

- Recap safe harvesting habits.
- Emphasize: When in doubt, throw it out!
- Q&A: Students share what they learned and how they’ll harvest safely in the school garden.



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Assessment

- “The Great Garden Grab: What’s Safe to Pick?” Worksheet: Matching safe/unsafe harvest images; complete a sorting activity
- **Journals:** Observation notes on hands-on harvesting
- **Participation:** Evaluate choices and reasoning during role-play

Lesson References & Resources

- [Safe Produce Handling](#)
- [USDA “Let’s Glean” toolkit](#)

Lesson Modifications for Different Ages and Abilities

Younger Students

- Turn role-play into a garden “safety sorting” game
- Use large picture cards instead of written questions
- Sing a simple rhyme: “Pick it clean, don’t eat what’s been seen on the ground!”

Older Students

- Research and present real-life cases of foodborne illness from unsafe harvesting
- Track the “farm-to-table” process with a harvesting safety checklist
- Add vocabulary: contamination, sanitation, pathogens, cross-contamination

Students with Learning Differences

- Use tactile tools (e.g., sorting cards, gloves)
- Provide sentence starters for journal responses
- Use visual charts of harvest steps and color-coded decision trees
- Pair students with buddies or do small-group harvesting practice



The Great Garden Grab: What's Safe to Pick? – Student Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Safe or Not Safe?

Circle the images that show safe harvesting practices.



picking fruit from a plant



eating fruit from the ground



eating plants with bug bites



harvesting with gloves

Match the Message

Draw a line from each action to what you should do:

Actions

Apples fell on the ground

Hands are muddy

Tomato still on the plant

You have clean scissors

Actions

Apples fell on the ground

Hands are muddy

Tomato still on the plant

You have clean scissors

Draw and Label!

Draw a picture of yourself harvesting a fruit or vegetable safely. Label what tools you are using and what you're doing to keep it clean.

Bonus: Think and Write

Why is it risky to eat food that has fallen on the ground?

Newsletter: "The Great Grab: What's Safe to Pick?"

Dear Families,

This week in the garden, students learned how to safely harvest fruits and vegetables. They discovered why it's important not to eat food that's fallen on the ground and how clean tools and hands help keep food safe after picking.

What We Learned:

What Not to Eat: Fruit that's fallen on the ground can carry germs, bugs, or dirt, so it isn't safe to eat

Harvesting Cleanly: We practiced picking ripe produce carefully, using clean hands and tools.

Safe Storage: Students learned to collect food in clean containers, not bags or bins that held dirty tools.

Try This at Home:

Harvest Together: Let your child help harvest herbs or vegetables from your garden or windowsill using clean tools and containers.

Sort and Decide: Look at garden produce together and talk about which foods are safe to pick and which should be discarded.

Observation Time: Ask your child to journal how picked produce looks different from fallen produce.

Career Spotlight:

Agricultural Inspector

These professionals inspect farms, gardens, and facilities to ensure food is grown and harvested safely. They're essential to keeping our food supply clean and healthy.

Learn more at **USDA Career Profiles:**

www.fsis.usda.gov/careers/career-profiles

Learn More:

Nebraska Extension: Handling Produce Safely from the Garden:

www.food.unl.edu/handling-produce-safely-garden/

Thank you for reinforcing these important lessons at home!