

Guidance for vegetable plots

Purpose

The purpose of this operational guidance is to ensure that all fresh produce used in any Compass Group UK&I recipes is grown, harvested, and handled in a way that prevents contamination and protects food safety, in line with Compass UK&I food safety and hygiene standards. Where there is a specific client request to provide speciality produce, it is recommended, in the first instance, that units engage with Foodbuy to source suitable ingredients through the Compass UK&I approved supply chain, be these national or small and local supplies, or investigate alternative growing methods such as hydroponic systems. This guidance does not apply to Republic of Ireland.

Our Planet Promise

Where any operational catering units are seeking to support the Our Planet Promise framework, and create a local vegetable plot, the local catering leadership team must ensure that where any produce, including herbs, vegetables or salad leaves, is grown locally at client locations, the controls detailed in this guidance are fully understood by all relevant unit team members, and adhered to at all times.

Catering Risk Assessment and Safety Task Cards

Prior to commencing with any activities to create local vegetable plots, ensure that the unit specific Catering Risk Assessment is reviewed and updated to confirm any locally grown produce will be grown, tended, harvested and handled in accordance with the controls detailed in this operational guidance. Also, ensure that all relevant colleagues engaged in vegetable plot activities have been trained on the requisite Compass Group UK&I Workplace Safety Management System Safety Task Cards, with completed training recorded on the colleague specific training record card.

Vegetable plot design

To grow produce locally, raised beds and/or containers must be used to create vegetable plots, and these should be a minimum of 600mm high, with a geotextile membrane placed across the base of the raised bed and/or open-bottomed container to prevent ground soil mixing with soil or compost sourced from a reputable supplier, but allowing rainwater and/or potable water used to water produce to infiltrate the soil. This will help to prevent potential contamination of the produce grown from ground soil sources.

Vegetable plot materials

A variety of materials are acceptable to construct raised vegetable plot beds or containers, to include pots, masonry materials, wood and sheet metal. For wooden constructions, the use of wood preserving chemicals must be avoided, for example avoiding the use of Creosote.

Vegetable plot soil and compost

To avoid growing produce in land and / or soil that may be contaminated, vegetable plots consisting of raised beds, should be filled with soils, compost and manure sourced from a reputable supplier, and any manure used, must be composted and / or have been subject to heat treatment, to ensure any harmful pathogens, such as E. coli are killed, with evidence of heat treatment certificate retained locally in unit. When adding any clean soil and / or any organic matter (clean compost and treated manure) to the existing raised vegetable plot bed and /or container soil, ensure this soil, compost or manure is also sourced from a reputable supplier to prevent the risks associated with cross-

contamination of produce grown. It is acceptable to compost produce items from general kitchen operations, for example coffee grounds, vegetable and / or fruit peelings.

Chemical safety

Raised beds and / or raised vegetable plot containers also help to minimise the potential for pest species to gain easy access and damage any produce grown in vegetable plots. Pesticides, and / or insecticides, must not be used to control any pest species. Raised beds can be netted to prevent access to bird species pests, and natural pest treatments must be used to manage gastropod pests, for example beer traps can help to effectively manage slugs and snails, and / or organic wool pellets placed around the base of plants, to discourage pest species, like slugs and snails from accessing and damaging produce. Furthermore, no other chemical products can be used, for example chemical based herbicides, or formulations that support produce growth and / or plant feeding.

Local flood events

Albeit vegetable plots are to consist of raised beds or containers, if there are any local flooding events, where water from the surrounding land and / or building infrastructure contaminates raised vegetable plots and / or containers and the produce grown within these, harvesting produce must not commence, and any floodwater contaminated crops must be disposed of through the appropriate waste streams to effectively prevent any potential contamination risks.

Water management

Water used to irrigate vegetable plots must be taken from a potable water source. Water from ground sources and / or roof and building run-offs should not be used, due to the potential for these alternative water sources to be subject to contamination with potentially harmful chemicals, bacteria or pathogens.

Harvesting produce

Prior to harvesting any produce grown in vegetable plots, and while recognising produce will be thoroughly washed prior to use, established open food handler personal hygiene requirements must be in place and followed for any colleagues harvesting vegetable plot produce. Furthermore, post harvesting of any produce colleagues must thoroughly wash their hands using Compass approved wash hand soap, with clean paper roll or towels used to dry hands post hand washing.

Washing produce

Prior to use, and in line with the principles detailed in Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 7 – food preparation, all produce grown in vegetable plots and / or containers must be thoroughly washed to remove any potential contaminants, including soil, dirt and any potential pest species. Peeling root vegetables and fruit can also help to remove soil and dirt, and environmental contaminants that may be present on the outer surfaces of vegetables and fruit prior to washing, reducing the overall levels of contamination on harvested produce.

Produce storage

All harvested produce must be stored in accordance with the requirements set out in Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 6 - Food delivery & storage.

Date coding

All harvested produce must be labelled in accordance with the requirements set out in Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 5 - Food labelling & shelf life. A regular visual check for quality must be used to determine when products should be discarded. Leafy greens should be used on the day of harvest.

Traceability

To ensure full traceability requirements are met, units must be able to demonstrate that the ingredients used in the menu items, where the produce has originated from an in unit managed vegetable plot can be traced. It is not permitted to use produce grown by the client in a client vegetable plot, where the operational controls detailed in this operational guidance cannot sufficiently be evidenced by the client. For example, where a client has a mature orchard accessible to the Compass Group UK&I catering unit, with mature fruit trees, the onus will be on the client to demonstrate their produce has been grown and tended in accordance with the parameters outlined in the guidance and is safe for human consumption. Where the client cannot evidence this, produce should not be used in Compass UK&I menus.

Alternative growing methods

For any sites or units utilising alternative produce growing systems, for example hydroponic systems used to grow micro herbs, leafy greens or fruit crops, unit teams must follow the hydroponic system manufacturer's instructions and guidance for use at all times and implement any relevant Workplace Safety Management System Safety Task Cards.

Additional guidance

1. **Personal hygiene:** Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 2 - Personal hygiene** for additional guidance on good personal hygiene, hand washing technique, uniform, and PPE standards.
2. **Shelf life:** Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 5 - Food labelling & shelf life** for additional guidance on labelling food within units and display counters.
3. **Food preparation:** Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 7 - Food preparation** for additional guidance on the requirements for safe food preparation.
4. **Food delivery & storage:** Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 6 - Food delivery & storage** for additional information of the safe and hygienic storage of food.

If you have any questions regarding this guidance, or require any further support and advice, please contact your HSE Sector Lead or Regional H&S Manager.