



#PlayToday

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promoting the value of play

Soil for Veggie gardens in Early Years services

Many ELC's have concerns that their soil may be contaminated so it is a good idea to consult your nursery before purchasing soil for veggie gardens.

Sandy loam or a mix of soil and sand is good for digging as it doesn't pack down and works for gardens.

Handwashing and general health practices need to be practised. People worry about 'faeces' in digging patches, gardens and sandpits, etc. but it is organic and the sand and soil at the beach and in public spaces are not sanitised and children dig there all the time. Covid19 has made everyone much better at handwashing and this is important after the experience.

Any potting mix and even your own compost can have fungi and bacteria, and possibly legionnaires which is everyone's fears. To counteract the dangers, children can wear well-fitting gloves (very hard to find for all sized hands) or children can wash hands after the gardening experience.

Potting mix bags should be fine, but some bulk suppliers for bigger gardens might give you more rubble than organic matter, buyer beware! The main consideration concerns airborne particles and so the soil needs to be kept moist. If children are carting and helping to establish a garden do your best to keep the soil damp.

The most important thing is in the preparation, so cutting the bags is recommended rather than ripping them open, as this is thought to not spread any spores so much as bursting open. Leave bags open for a bit and open away from the face. You are best to put in buckets or wheelbarrows for children and this permits more circulation and helps with dispersing spores before children handle it. Educators can wear masks during preparation if they are worried about legionnaires which we are all pretty used to now. Legionnaires is usually rare and even rarer in children.

The benefits for children in developing and looking after veggie gardens are limitless in both life skill development, part of building healthy eating lifestyles, sensory benefits particularly for babies and some children with additional needs, health benefits of getting your hands dirty (no gloves) is thought to increase serotonin levels which is a natural distress chemical and is supported by loads of research about immune building, and it's sustainable and fun!

The best safety resource we have sourced for early years is unfortunately not Australian but from our NZ neighbours www.growingkiwigardens.co.nz, and Play Australia promotes this form of play and learning.