

## CAN I EAT PRODUCE FROM MY GARDEN AFTER A FLOOD?

Simply put, the safest answer is no. Discarding all produce that was touched by flood water eliminates any and all risks, and is the only way to ensure you and your family do not become ill from consuming these items. Flood water can be contaminated with a variety of things including sewage, farm run-off, industrial run-off and other pollutants, and you simply don't know what was in the water.

However, when a flood occurs early in the growing season, many gardeners wonder if they can salvage at least part of their garden. Consider the following:

- All produce that is consumed uncooked or raw should be discarded. This includes leafy vegetables such as lettuce and spinach — no matter the maturity. Soft fruits that are ready to harvest, like berries, should also be discarded.
- Melons and other fruits that will be eaten raw should be discarded.
- Underground vegetables that are still early in growth (roughly four months from harvest) should be safe if allowed to grow to maturity. These include beets, carrots and potatoes. These should be washed, sanitized and rinsed as directed before cooking thoroughly.



- Early season crops that are set to be harvested within a few weeks after a flood that haven't been touched by flood waters should be safe to eat if cooked or peeled. However, it must be completely intact — if it is soft, cracked, bruised or has open fissures, dispose of it. If there is any question as to whether flood water has contacted the produce or not, throw it out. To prepare these items:
  1. Prepare a chlorine solution of approximately 1 tablespoon of bleach diluted in 1 gallon of clean water to reach a concentration of 200 parts per million. This measurement is based on a 5.25% sodium hypochlorite concentration in the bleach.
  2. Rinse the produce well with clear tap water.
  3. Submerge and soak items in chlorine solution for 2 minutes. (Note: Chlorine loses effectiveness quickly in dirty water. Monitor solution and change as necessary.)
  4. Rinse produce completely in clear, cool tap water.
  5. Peel and cook thoroughly before eating.

**1 T : 1 GAL : 2 MINS**

- Late-season vegetables that come from flowers produced on growth that develops after flood waters recede should be safe. This includes tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, squash, cucumbers, sweet corn and similar vegetables. Cook these vegetables thoroughly, or wash them well and peel them before eating.

*Adapted from University of Wisconsin fact sheet "Safely Using Produce from Flooded Gardens" by Barbara Ingham and Steve Ingham. Publish date 2007. Reviewed by Lewis Jett, WVU Extension Service consumer horticulture specialist. Publish date June 2016.*