

Gardening After a Flood: Soil and Garden Safety

- Flood water can have **germs and chemicals** that make people and pets sick.
- Food from gardens affected by flood water may be **unsafe to eat**.

When in doubt – throw it out!

Whether it is safe to eat plants raw that have been had contact with flood water depends on the source of the flood water, time to harvest, and if the plants have absorbed contaminants.

Discard (Do not compost)

Discard plants that have come into direct contact with floodwater, even if they have not been completely submerged under water.

- Crops eaten raw or not cooked
- Surface crops such as leafy greens, herbs, berries, soft fruits, cabbage, broccoli, and fruiting tomatoes. These foods can be difficult to wash even if they have had only indirect contact with flood water.
- Underground crops such as onions, potato, leek, radish, carrot, daikon, edible roots
- Crops grown on the ground with a hard outer skin, such as watermelon and winter squash



Direct contact



- Submerged by flood water
- Splashed by flood water

Indirect contact



The edible part of the plant was not submerged or splashed by flood water

Example: Pole beans that will be shelled and cooked before eating

Wait to Harvest

- 90 days – For edible portion of crops not in direct contact with flood water
- 120 Days – For crops that were submerged or splashed by flood water
- Note: Soils in industrial areas or areas of higher risk of environmental pollution should be replaced and replanted



Wash and Cook

- Thoroughly clean and wash produce to remove all dirt
- Eat only produce that can be thoroughly cooked

Note: Cooking will not reduce risk from industrial pollutants

Reduce your Risks

- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water even if you wore gloves. Use a nail brush to remove dirt
- Dry produce with a disposable paper towel
- Prevent cross-contamination by washing with soap and water then sanitizing (with 1 tablespoon bleach for 1 gallon water):
 - Food contact surfaces
 - Garden tools used to harvest vegetables
- Wear shoes and gloves when gardening
- Take off your shoes at the door to avoid bringing dirt inside
- Change your clothing after gardening



Rebuild your Garden

- Test your soil. King County and Seattle residents may be eligible for free soil tests. Visit the King Conservation District to learn more:
<https://kingcd.org/programs/better-soils/healthy-soil/>
- Replace your garden soil or add at least 6 inches of clean compost to dilute contaminants
- Use raised beds and container gardens if you live in an area with higher risk of industrial pollutants