

South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Service Responding to Flood If Your Garden Flooded

Soil from gardens, including those still unplanted, that were recently flooded may not be safe for fruit and vegetable production. Depending on the location, flood waters may contain contaminants such as agricultural or other chemicals, as well as disease-causing organisms from fresh manure, septic systems, and even lagoons.

- Any leafy greens that are eaten fresh, such as lettuce or cabbage, should be destroyed. They are at risk of contamination for 90 days following a flood.
- Leafy greens that will be cooked, such as spinach, should be cut back completely and allowed to re-grow before using. Cook thoroughly.
- Remove the blossom or set fruit from strawberry plants exposed to flood waters. Any strawberries that are consumed within in the next 90 days from these plants should be cooked before consuming.
- Peel and thoroughly cook root crops.
- If peas, beans, squash, or tomatoes were present on plants, they should be picked and discarded. Any of these vegetables that contact the ground during the 3 months following the flood should be either discarded or washed and thoroughly cooked. Underground vegetables such as carrots and potatoes should be peeled and thoroughly cooked. Thoroughly wash produce with thick outer rinds, such as melons and squash, before cutting open.
- Always wash fresh fruits and vegetables with running water and with friction. Detergents or chlorine bleach are not recommended. Fruits and vegetables are porous and will absorb these chemicals. Some sprays approved for use on fruits and vegetables may be helpful in removing debris and dirt from the surface of the produce. Food borne illness has been associated with garden vegetables contaminated with flood waters containing pathogenic bacteria, parasites, and viruses. The more common pathogens involved in these outbreaks include *E. coli* 0157:H7, *Cryptosporidium parvum*, *Cyclospora*, *Giardia*, *Campylobacter* and the hepatitis A organism. An unsafe, flooded garden product cannot be made safe by chlorine bleach or a similar product.
- Although pathogens will eventually die out, they can remain present in the soil for several months. If the area was contaminated with feedlot or septic overflow, it is recommended that no produce be used from the garden for 90 days.
- Soil or produce samples can be submitted to a commercial testing laboratory to verify the presence or absence of pathogens.
- Use good personal hygiene practices. Wash your hands before and after gardening. Leave your garden shoes at the door, and change clothing after working in a flooded garden. Avoid direct contact with flood waters, including the soil, as much as possible.
- Young children can be at a high risk for some food borne illnesses. If a garden plot has been flooded, consider either not having young children in the garden with you or take precautions to utilize good personal hygienic practices.

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For more information contact your local Extension office.
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