

Gardening in Lead-Contaminated Soil

If you eat vegetables grown in soil that contain lead, lead can get into the vegetables you eat, and possibly cause health problems for you and your family.

Here are some simple things you can do to lower your family's lead exposure when you eat vegetables grown in your garden:



Clean vegetables well before cooking or eating.



- Throw away old and outer leaves of vegetables.
- Wash all vegetables with cold water.
 - Scrub vegetables with a brush to help remove dirt. Rinse vegetables well before eating.
- Scrub and peel root crops such as carrots, potatoes, turnips, and onions before eating them.

Avoid planting root crops in contaminated soils or grow vegetables in raised beds or containers



- Grow crops such as tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, peas, beans, or corn. They are less likely to absorb lead.
- Grow leafy vegetables such as lettuce and root crops (carrots, potatoes) in containers or raised beds filled with clean soil.
 - You can purchase clean soil from nurseries or garden stores.

Do...



- Add peat moss, compost, or manure to your soil. These bind the lead in soil so that vegetables absorb less lead.
- Keep soil pH at 6.5 or higher so that plants will absorb less lead.
- Cover all bare soil in the garden with 2-4 inches of clean mulch, such as wood chips, grass clippings, clean soil, or compost.
- Wash your hands, clothes and shoes after gardening to avoid tracking soil and dust into your home.
- Make sure children who are helping in the garden or playing in contaminated soil also follow these guidelines.

Do not...



- Grow vegetables in the drip zone and around the foundation of older buildings.
- Eat food, chew gum, or smoke when working in the yard. Touching soil and then putting things you touched in your mouth can increase your exposure to lead.

Get your child tested for lead today!



- Most children with lead poisoning do not act or look sick.
 - The only way to know if your child has lead poisoning is to have a blood lead test.
- Children 6 years and younger are more likely to have lead poisoning.

Contact Chatham County Environmental Health at 919-545-8309 to request lead testing for your child.



Questions?

If you have questions about gardening in soil that has lead, call Chatham County Environmental Health or the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).



- Chatham County Environmental Health
 - 919-542-8208
- ATSDR, Region 4 (Atlanta)
 - 770-488-3000
- NCDHHS Health Hazard Control Unit
 - 919-707-5950
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>
- NCDHHS Children's Environmental Health Unit
 - <https://ehs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/hhccehb/cehu/>

Information about Gardening

- Gardening and Land Reuse
 - <http://clu-in.org/ecotools/urbangardens.cfm>
- Urban Agriculture
 - <http://www.epa.gov/brownsfields/urbanag/index.html>
- Gardening in Urban Soils
 - English: http://www.clu-in.org/download/misc/urban_gardening_fact_sheet.pdf
 - Spanish: http://www.clu-in.org/download/misc/urban_gardening_fact_sheet_sp.pdf
- NCSU Gardening Contaminants
 - <https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/soils/soil-contaminants/chromium-in-the-garden/>
 - <https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/soils/soil-contaminants/lead-in-the-garden/>

Based on resources from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry