

# Garden Produce in Floods

## *Our garden was covered by floodwater. Can we eat the vegetables that were growing?*

The safety of unharvested fruits and vegetables will depend on:

- Kind of produce
- Maturity of produce at the time of flooding
- Time of year flooding occurred
- Severity of flooding (depth of water and silt)
- Duration of flooding
- Bacterial content of floodwater
- Likelihood of contamination from sewage or other bacterial contaminants

In general, fruits and vegetables that were immature at the time of flooding should be safe to eat by the time they are ready to harvest. This would include vegetables in the blossom or pre-blossom stage. For additional safety, wash thoroughly and cook before eating.

If fruits and vegetables were ready for harvest and came in contact with floodwater, they should not be used.

Some fruits and vegetables are more susceptible than others to bacterial contamination.

- Leafy vegetables (such as lettuce, cabbage, mustard, kale, collards, spinach, Swiss Chard, and celery), fleshy vegetables (such as tomatoes, summer squash, and peppers), and berry fruits (such as strawberries) are highly susceptible to bacterial contamination. Silt and other contaminants may be imbedded in the leaves, petioles, stems, or other natural openings of fleshy structures and can be difficult to remove. Do not use if mature when flooded. In the case of strawberries, do not use any fruit that is set on, regardless of maturity.
- Root, bulb, and tuber crops (such as beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, onions, and potatoes) are less susceptible to bacterial contamination. Wash with scrubbing, peel, and cook them before eating. Because radishes and green onions are not cooked, they should not be used. Green onions can be left to grow into a mature bulb for later use.
- Produce with a protected fruit or impervious outer skin (such as peas, melons, eggplant, sweet corn, or winter squash) should be washed thoroughly before the outer shell, skin, or husk is removed. Then shell, peel, or husk the produce and cook before eating.

**For more information check these Iowa State University Extension resources.**

Answer Line  
800-262-3804  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline)

Distribution Center  
515-294-5247  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/store](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store)

Horticulture  
[www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu)

HortLine  
515-294-3108

Prepared by Sam Beattie, extension food science specialist, and Richard Jauron, extension horticulturist.

### References

Safe Handling of Fruits and Vegetables, Produce Marketing Association; "Always wash produce, so quality won't go down the drain." news release, Agricultural Information Service, Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences; The Extension Agent's Handbook for Emergency Preparation and Response, Texas Ag Extension Service; and Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center, Ohio State University Extension.

File: FN 1, Hort and LA 2-9

### ... and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914 in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.

SP 328 June 2008