

# Floods 19

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## FLOODED GARDEN PRODUCE

If floodwaters have covered a garden, some produce will be unsafe to eat. The safety of unharvested fruits and vegetables will depend on:

- 1) kind of produce
- 2) maturity of produce at the time of flooding
- 3) time of year flooding occurred: possible recurrence of flood in same week.
- 4) severity of flooding (depth of water and silt)
- 5) duration of flooding
- 6) bacterial content of floodwater
- 7) likelihood of contamination from sewage or other bacterial contaminants

### Immature produce

In general, fruits and vegetables, which were more than 2 weeks immature at the time of flooding, should be safe to eat by the time they are ready for harvest. For additional safety, disinfect produce (see below) and cook it before eating.

### Mature produce

Unless flooding was light and there is no danger of bacterial contamination from floodwater, avoid using fruits and vegetables that were ready for harvest at the time of flooding. Unless they can be disinfected, peeled, and thoroughly cooked. Some fruits such as tomatoes, cucumbers, summer squash, strawberries, and peppers would be highly susceptible to bacterial contamination.

- 1) Leafy vegetables such as lettuce, cabbage, mustard, kale, collards, spinach, swiss chard, celery, and fleshy vegetables and berry fruits such as tomatoes, cucumbers, summer squash, strawberries, and peppers would be highly susceptible to bacterial contamination.

Don't pick contaminated strawberries unless there was a quick recession of floodwaters and a lot of immature fruit at time of flooding (2 weeks before ripening).

Silt and other contaminants might be imbedded in the leaves, petioles, stems or other mature openings of fleshy structures, and could be difficult to remove.

- 2) Root, bulb and tuber crops such as beets, carrots, radishes, trumps, onions, and potatoes would be less susceptible to bacterial contamination. Disinfect these vegetables. Peel, and cook them thoroughly before eating.

- 3) Produce with a protected fruit or impervious outer skin such as peas, melons, and eggplant. Or winter squash should be washed and disinfected before the outer shell, skin or husk is removed. Then shell, peel, or husk the produce, and cook it if possible.

Covered sweet corn would mold and should be discarded.

### Disinfecting measures

Thoroughly wash and disinfect any produce before eating.

- 1) Wash in a strong detergent solution with a clean scrub brush. Remove all silt.

- 2) Immerse produce for 15 to 20 minutes in a chlorine solution. Household bleaches contain from 2% to 6% chlorine. The amount of bleach to add to water depends on the percentage chlorine it contains;

% chlorine in bleach	Volume of bleach to add to one quart of water	Volume of bleach to add to one gallon of water
2%	¾ tablespoon	2 tablespoons
4%	1 teaspoon	1 tablespoon
6%	½ teaspoon	¾ tablespoon

- 3) Rinse thoroughly with safe drinking water.

- 4) Peel, if possible, and cook thoroughly before eating.

Refer any specific questions to health authorities or your county Extension agent.