



Flooded Gardens



“See
‘Meal Preparation
and Food Safety
after a Flood’ for
more detailed
information.”

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This document is IFAS
publication DH 621.

Adapted by UF/IFAS from:
Extension Agent’s Hand-
book for Emergency Prep-
aration and Response
(Texas Agricultural
Extension Services and the
Hazard Reduction and
Recovery Center)

If flood waters have covered a garden, some produce will be unsafe to eat. 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 which were immature at the time of flooding should be safe to eat by the time they are ready to harvest. For additional safety, disinfect produce and cook it before eating.

Unless flooding was light and there is no danger of bacterial contamination from floodwater, do not use fruits and vegetables that were ready for harvest at the time of flooding unless they are disinfected, peeled and thoroughly cooked. Some fruits and vegetables are more susceptible than others to bacterial contamination.

Leafy vegetables such as lettuce, cabbage, mustard, kale, collards, spinach, swiss chard, celery, and fleshy vegetables and berry fruits such as tomatoes, summer squash, strawberries and peppers 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.

Root, bulb and tuber crops such as beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, onions and potatoes are less susceptible to bacterial contamination.

Disinfect these vegetables, peel and cook them thoroughly before eating.

Produce with a protected fruit or impervious outer skin such as peas, melons, eggplant, sweet corn 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.

Thoroughly wash and disinfect any produce before eating. Wash in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush. Remove all silt.

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:

If the percentage of chlorine in your bleach is:	Then add this much bleach to a quart of water:
2%	$\frac{3}{4}$ Tablespoon
4%	1 teaspoon
6%	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon

Rinse thoroughly with safe drinking water. Peel if possible and cook thoroughly before eating.

Refer any specific questions to health authorities or your County Extension Agent.

Don't pick contaminated strawberries unless there was a quick recession of flood waters and a lot of immature fruit at time of flooding (two weeks before ripening). Silt and other contaminants might be embedded in the leaves, petioles, stems or other natural openings of fleshy structures and could be difficult to remove.

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

Produce with a protected fruit or impervious outer skin such as peas, melons, eggplant or winter squash should be washed and disinfected before outer shell, skin or husk is removed. Then shell, peel or husk the produce and cook it. Covered sweet corn will mold and should be discarded.

Produce Disinfecting Measures

Thoroughly wash, disinfect and cook any produce before eating.

- ① Wash in 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 (see Table 1 for strength of chlorine).
- 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.

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