

FOOD SAFETY INFOSHEET: RECOVERING FROM A STORM

GARDEN FLOODING



FLOODING can lead to increased food safety risks associated with garden-grown produce.

Flood waters can contain pathogens and toxins; if a garden has been submerged by flooding it is possible that human pathogens have been introduced into the system.

- 1. What is the risk?** With flooding, especially following a hurricane or other large storm, pathogens including *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, Hepatitis A and norovirus can be introduced to flood waters. Flooding events can spread contaminants from a localized area (such as a compost pile) throughout the entire garden. It is difficult to assess the cleanliness. After a hurricane, if waste water treatment facilities or other animal sources of have been breached, it is likely that floodwaters are contaminated.
- 2. Should all of the produce be thrown away?** The most conservative answer is to discard all products touched by the flood water. Produce that would be consumed raw should definitely be thrown away as pathogen removal is not possible. Soon-to-be-harvested soft fruits, like berries, should also be discarded. Plants where fruits have set (tomatoes) or where flowers are evident (broccoli/cauliflower) at the time of flooding present an undefined risk - good evidence-based data is not really available.
- 3. What about the vegetables that are underground?** If the vegetables underground are still early in their growing season (more than four weeks remaining to harvest), they should be able to grow to maturity safely. If they are harvested within a month of harvesting, they must be washed, rinsed, sanitized, and cooked before consumption.
- 4. Can I preserve the produce from the garden?** Canning produce that has been affected by flood waters is not advisable as quality is likely low and these products are at higher risk for chemical and physical contaminants.
- 5. What if my garden is near a flooded area?** If you can confirm that flood waters did not reach the garden locale, the product is not at an increased risk. Note that hands, clothing and footwear that have been worn in flood waters can carry pathogens that can be introduced into the garden. An extra focus on handwashing and hygiene after a flooding event can reduce the risk of pathogen and contaminant introduction into the garden.

Adapted from University of Wisconsin Garden Facts XHT1187 (Barbara Ingham and Steven Ingham)