

Can I Eat Fruits and Vegetables Grown in My Garden?

Yes. Homegrown fruits and vegetables are highly unlikely to contain arsenic levels that would affect your health. Vegetables grown in soils with arsenic will take up some small amounts of arsenic. However, we believe the benefits from the eating your homegrown fruits and vegetables outweigh the risk presented by their arsenic content. By following the recommendations in the Tips for Safe Gardening, Safe Play, and a Safe Home section, you can greatly reduce your exposure to arsenic from the soil.

Tips for Safe Gardening, Safe Play, and a Safe Home

Preparing Your Garden Soil

We are all exposed to a little arsenic every day. The recommendations below are for people who want to keep their exposure to the minimum possible. These recommendations are intended to be on the safe side. Under normal circumstances, a lapse in following these recommendations will not, by itself, lead to health problems.

- Increase the organic matter in your soil by adding compost or manure from outside sources such as commercial garden centers.
- Keep soil pH in the near-neutral range (pH 6–7). For a soils test, check with your local agricultural extension office or purchase a soils test kits at a garden center.
- Maintain adequate levels of plant nutrients by using a balanced commercial fertilizer.
- Maintain adequate levels of iron in your soil.
- Consider building a raised-bed garden. Fill it with topsoil and compost from outside sources or areas of your yard that do not have elevated levels of arsenic.

Note: Do not use chromated copper arsenate (CCA)-treated wood to build your raised garden beds. CCA contains arsenic that can leach into your soil. Use a safer nonarsenic pressure-treated wood such as ammoniacal copper quaternary (ACQ). Bricks, stone, or other wood products such as cedar or redwood can be used to build a raised garden bed.

Working in the Garden and Yard

- Avoid eating or drinking while working in the yard or garden because contaminated soil and dust might get on your food and you could accidentally swallow it.
- Dampen soils with water before you garden to limit the amount of dust you inhale.
- Avoid working in the yard on windy days, when dust can be stirred up and possibly increase your exposure.
- Consider wearing a mask if you spend time in dusty areas.
- Wash your hands after gardening.
- Wash work clothes to remove dust and dirt.
- Take your shoes off at the door to avoid tracking soil into your home.

Preparing Fruits and Vegetables

- Clean your hands, cutting boards, and kitchen tools with hot, soapy water and rinse well before and after handling your fruits and vegetables.
- Soak garden produce in cool water and rinse thoroughly until the water runs clear. Commercial vegetable cleaning products are available in supermarkets to help free soil residues from your produce. These products work well with leafy vegetables. Vinegar can also be used for cleaning produce.
- Scrub firm fruits and root crops with a vegetable-cleaning brush to remove dust and dirt before peeling or eating.
- Peel root crops like carrots, rutabagas, radishes, and turnips.
- Wash berry fruits like strawberries and blackberries, and remove the “caps” (the tops of the berries where the stem and leaves attach).

Additional Information is available at:

<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1884/eb1884.pdf>