

Jefferson County Extension Service, 810 Barret Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-1782
Phone: (502) 569-2344 Fax: (502) 569-3958 <http://ces.ca.uky.edu/Jefferson>

Flooded Fruits and Vegetables Should Be Discarded

Fresh fruits and vegetables that have been partially or completely submerged in flood water or that might have come in contact with contaminated water are not safe to consume. There is a high health risk of developing disease from consuming these products. Flood water may be contaminated with sewage, animal waste, heavy metals, pathogenic microorganisms, or other contaminants. These contaminants are not only on the surface of the fruits and vegetables, but may move into plant tissues. The Food and Drug Administration considers these products “adulterated” and not fit for consumption. Pooled or standing water after a rainfall that is not likely to be contaminated should not be considered flooding.

If your produce is in close proximity to a flooded area but has not come in contact with flood water, prevent cross contamination by keeping harvesting or cleaning equipment and personnel away from the flooded area during growth and harvest.

If an unplanted field has been partially or completely flooded, determine the source of flood water and determine whether there are significant threats to human health. Allow soils to dry sufficiently and rework the soil, before planting crops. Microbial soil testing can provide valuable information regarding relative health risks, but sampling in itself does not guarantee the lack of human pathogens.

Produce from flood-damaged gardens should not be sold at the farmers market or farm stand until the risk of contamination is gone. Produce should also not be used for home canning.

As always, proper food handling methods in the kitchen are important for food safety. They include, washing hands while preparing food, cleaning and disinfecting work surfaces, equipment and supplies, use potable water and “if in doubt, throw it out”.

Reference: FDA Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (www.foodsafety.gov/~prodguid.html)

By Sandra Bastin, Associate Extension Professor, Food and Nutrition Specialist, University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture