

Prepare to eat and enjoy!

- Always wash or rinse fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- If you are concerned about chemicals in the soil, **peel below-ground vegetables** (such as carrots and potatoes) and those grown in close contact with soil (such as cucumbers).
- Remove **outside leaves of leafy head vegetables** (such as lettuce and cabbage) that may have soil particles stuck to them.



For more information

For general gardening information:

Cornell Cooperative Extension

www.cce.cornell.edu

Cornell University's Gardening Resources

www.gardening.cornell.edu

National Gardening Association

www.gardening.org

For more information about IPM

(Integrated Pest Management):

www.nysipm.cornell.edu/

If you have specific questions about health issues related to gardening, call the New York State Department of Health at 518-402-7800 or toll-free at 800-458-1158 or e-mail: BTSA@health.state.ny.us

For analysis of soils for harmful chemicals, find a commercial laboratory certified for 'solid and hazardous waste' at the New York State Department of Health certification program's web site: www.wadsworth.org/labcert/elap/elap.html

Another source for information about collecting and testing soil samples is the Cornell Waste Management Institute web site: <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm>

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets also has information on community and school gardens.

If you are seeking space in an existing community garden, or are interested in starting a community garden in your neighborhood: www.agmkt.state.ny.us/CG/cghome.html

If you are interested in school gardens: www.agmkt.state.ny.us/f2s/documents/Farm-to-School-Bro-9-11-08.pdf



People grow their own fruits and vegetables in backyards, community gardens or even in pots on rooftops and window sills. The tips in this brochure will help gardeners learn more about where to plant, how to prepare new garden areas and how to grow and harvest healthier fruits and vegetables.

Why garden?

There are many benefits to growing your own fruits and vegetables, such as

- More fresh and healthy food – fruits and vegetables contain fiber, vitamins and minerals and can reduce the risk of stroke, diabetes, heart disease, obesity and some types of cancer
- More control over whether chemicals are used to treat for pests and weeds
- More exercise and a chance to connect with nature
- Less need to transport food from distant farms
- Lower fruit and vegetable bills at the grocery store



Where's the best location for my garden?

There are many factors to consider. To start, you will want a sunny spot with good drainage. Look for an area that already has a lot of grasses and weeds.

Some areas may be a problem if they have soil with harmful chemicals. Chemicals may be there naturally or from past and present land use. Gardening can increase your chance of being exposed to these chemicals, particularly by eating fruits or



vegetables grown in the soil and by accidentally swallowing or breathing in soil particles.

If you can, pick a garden space away from roads and buildings, especially old buildings that could deposit lead paint chips and dust. If you see signs of waste ash, oil or other waste material, consider another location. Also, avoid flood-prone areas since some rivers and streams can leave chemical-containing sediment on the land.

If you think your garden area may contain high levels of chemicals, the only way to know for sure is to test the soil through a certified laboratory (see web sites at the end of this brochure). But this can be expensive and the test results can be hard to interpret. It's better to avoid planting in those areas if possible.

How do I grow and harvest healthy fruits and vegetables?

Maintain good soil.

- Each year, **add aged compost or manure** to enrich the soil. Also, check your soil pH – the ideal range varies from plant to plant. If your soil is too acidic, increase the pH by adding lime, available from your local gardening supply store. Rich soil with proper pH levels can make it less likely that the plants will take up harmful chemicals.
- **Mulch the soil.** Mulch maintains soil moisture and controls weeds. It also reduces soil splash on vegetables during rain or watering, which can reduce your exposure to chemicals in soil.

Follow these planting and gardening tips.

- If you are concerned about chemicals in the soil, **consider growing vegetables in raised beds** with clean soil (at least ten inches deep). Use untreated wood to make the beds. Pressure-treated wood and railroad ties contain added chemicals.

- **Wear gloves** when working in the garden and avoid bringing soil inside the house. Brush off your clothes and remove shoes and gloves.
- **Wash up with soap and water** after gardening or any time before you eat.
- **Keep an eye on little ones** to make sure they do not eat soil or put dirty toys or other objects in their mouths. Young children can be more sensitive to certain chemicals in soil, such as lead.
- If you are having problems with pests, **try using an "Integrated Pest Management" (IPM)** approach (see the web address listed on the back of this brochure). If you do use pesticides, carefully read and follow all label instructions.
- And remember, if you plan to be outside for more than 10-15 minutes, **apply sunscreen or wear protective clothes** (for example, long sleeve shirt, long pants and a wide brimmed hat).