



NEWS RELEASE

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Food Safety Starts in the Garden

There's nothing better than fresh, homegrown fruits and vegetables from the garden, right? But wait - a word of caution is in order, warned Dan Sullivan, a soil scientist, and Carolyn Raab, foods and nutrition specialist, with the Oregon State University Extension Service. Recent outbreaks of food poisoning have been traced to fruits and vegetables eaten raw. Sprouts, lettuce, cabbage, tomatoes, and melons have all been involved in isolated outbreaks.

Fruits and vegetables can be carriers of pathogens that cause food borne illnesses such as Ecoli 0157:H7, Salmonella, and Listeria, especially if animal manure has been used in or is near the garden, explained Raab. "The risk associated with garden produce is small, but it's there," she said. To avoid the potential food safety risks, Sullivan and Raab have some recommendations.

In the Garden

What does this mean for the home gardener? When you are growing fruits and vegetables, be particularly careful if and when you use animal manure in the garden. Don't use manure where the part of the crop that you eat touches the soil. Plant crops whose edible parts contact the soil (such as carrots, potatoes, lettuce, radishes, and melons) in a section of the garden where manure is not used. "If you do choose to apply fresh or partially composted manure to the vegetable garden, apply it to a crop such as sweet corn that does not touch the soil and is less likely to be contaminated.

In the Kitchen

Use recommended food preparation techniques with garden produce. To be safe, always wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly under clean running water before cooking or eating. Commercial produce cleaners or sprays are no more effective at cleaning than water; and they may leave residues, which have not been tested for human consumption.

Be especially careful when washing garden produce that has had direct contact with the soil, such as lettuce, onions, lettuce, radishes, and other produce that is eaten raw. Use a vegetable brush to remove visible soil from firm produce, such as oranges and potatoes. Peeling fruit and vegetables also helps insure your produce is safe. (Be sure to wash produce before peeling it.)

When Serving Members of High Risk Groups

Safe handling is even more important when the fruits and vegetables will be eaten by people who are more likely to get food poisoning, including young children, pregnant women, older adults and those with cancer, AIDS and other immune-compromising diseases. "If a family member is at risk, serve cooked or canned vegetables and fruits for an extra margin of safety," said Raab. "Heating kills bacteria and parasites."

Source: Savonen, C. Food Safety Starts in the Garden, *Garden Hints*, Oregon State University Extension Service. Savonen, C. *If You Use Manure in Your Garden, Take Precautions*. Garden Hints, Oregon State University Extension Service.