

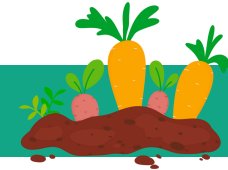


CHECKING HOMEGROWN PRODUCE AFTER A FIRE

Guidelines for Individuals

After a wildfire, smoke and ash can impact your homegrown fruits and vegetables. These simple guidelines will help you check your crops for any contamination and make informed decisions about whether it's best to harvest and eat them.

When in doubt, throw it out.



Before using or eating produce from a home garden

Smoke from fires can carry **contaminants** from ash and natural or man-made material that burned. Wear personal protective equipment such as a N95 respirator, rubber gloves and boots, long sleeved shirt and pants when cleaning ash from garden.

Common contaminants include:

- **Hydrocarbons** such as petroleum products from roads, car garages, or auto industries
- **Heavy metals** like lead, cadmium, nickel and arsenic in metals, old building paint and piping, electronics, batteries, and many industrial processes
- **Chemicals** in farm or landscape settings, machinery or equipment
- **Hazardous substances** used or stored on industrial sites and buildings in the fire area



Avoid gardening when Air Quality Index (AQI) is unsafe

Wildfires produce a lot of particulate matter and large pieces of ash that travel long distances and are a health hazard. Take precautions if you smell smoke or see ash.

Find your area's air quality here: <https://bit.ly/42iDA40>

See <https://www.aqmd.gov/smokesafety> for details.

For windblown ash-affected areas

Best Practices for inspecting your garden's produce, when air quality is safe:

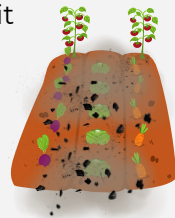
- Check for ash in top soil, plants, and trees.
- Pre-rinse your produce with a hose or bucket of clean water **outside** to remove soil and ash.
- Wash hands thoroughly before handling produce inside.
- Remove the outer leaves of lettuce or leafy greens.
- Rinse and rub produce well under cool running water; peel before cooking or serving.
- Soak deeply veined greens like kale and fuzzy fruits like peaches in a 10% white vinegar solution to remove soil particles.
- Avoid root crops that grow in the soil like carrots or potatoes as they absorb more contaminants.
- Avoid planting crops in contaminated soil.
- Properly washed fruits from trees are safe to eat.

For areas heavily covered by ash

If produce is completely covered in ash, throw it away in the **yard waste** trash can.

Washing produce thoroughly can help reduce surface contaminants, but it will not remove toxins that may have been absorbed by plants.

When in doubt, throw it out.



Before entering your home, remove your shoes and change into clean clothes. Put smoky clothes in a bag to avoid bringing ash into your home and wash them as soon as possible separately to avoid cross contamination.

Use soil remediation if areas are not heavily covered by ash

Adding compost, manure, and peat moss to your soil may decrease contaminant absorption into produce. Covering bare soil with wood chips, grass clippings, compost, and more clean soil can decrease exposure to contaminants. **Do not** use ash as fertilizer/soil conditioner in your yard or garden.



For questions regarding these guidelines, please contact Environmental Health at ehmail@ph.lacounty.gov or (888) 700-9995.

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COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health