

GARDENING & LEAD: SAFETY TIPS FOR POTENTIALLY CONTAMINATED SOIL

FACT SHEET

Based on preliminary results of the study in Black Eagle, it appears that gardening and consuming produce grown in the soil is not a public health concern. However, individuals interested in taking extra precautions can follow those outlined in this fact sheet.

Gardening is a great way to promote good health. It can encourage you and your family to spend quality time together, eat more fruits and vegetables, and enjoy some physical activity.

Is lead dangerous?

Lead exposure negatively impacts people's health and can affect every organ system. It does not matter if a person breathes, swallows, or absorbs lead particles, the health effects are the same; however, the body absorbs higher levels of lead when it is breathed in.

Garden location

Consider growing your crops using one of these methods to decrease potential exposure to lead:

- ◆ Dig out and dispose of the top 6 inches of soil, lay down a barrier of landscaping fabric, and fill the site with new, lead-free soil.
- ◆ Build raised beds using safe materials, lay down a barrier of landscaping fabric, and fill the beds with clean soil.
- ◆ Grow crops in containers filled with clean soil.
- ◆ Locate your garden as far as possible from busy streets, highways, or old buildings. Traffic can spread dust contaminated with lead and old buildings may shed lead paint.



Working in your garden

The most important thing to keep in mind while working in your garden is to avoid getting soil in your mouth or tracking it into your home.

- ◆ Wash hands, toys, or anything else that comes into contact with your garden soil.
- ◆ Wear gloves while gardening and when harvesting produce.
- ◆ Take gardening shoes off before entering your home, and avoid contact between gardening clothes and furniture.
- ◆ Encourage kids to play in areas other than the garden.

Protecting Your Garden

These tips will help reduce the chances that the plants in your garden will become contaminated:

- ◆ Add organic materials, like compost, manure, leaves, or grass clippings to your garden. Organic compounds bind lead and make it less available to contaminate plants.
- ◆ Add mulch to the garden to reduce dust and to prevent soil from splashing onto plants during irrigation or rainstorms.
- ◆ If someone nearby is removing paint or doing other home renovation, cover your entire garden with canvas to catch paint chips and dust. Remove after the work is completed.



Enjoying your produce

- ◆ Wash produce thoroughly to remove soil completely.
- ◆ Keep preparation surfaces clean of soil.
- ◆ Throw away the outer leaves of leafy vegetables and peel root crops to remove the skin and soil clinging to it.

For more information, please contact

The City-County Health Department (CCHD)
(406) 454-6950

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
(303) 312-6580

US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
(406) 457-5038

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
(406) 444-6454