



One of the many reasons hobby farming is so appealing is the reduced risk of foodborne illnesses since you know exactly where your food has come from and how it was handled. Foods produced at small hobby farms often have less processing than most mass-produced food that will often go through many distributors and locations before reaching your table.

ALTHOUGH HOBBY FARMING CAN SIGNIFICANTLY HELP MINIMIZE THE RISK OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS, THERE ARE STILL SEVERAL STEPS THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN TO REDUCE THIS RISK AND HELP ENSURE YOUR HOME GROWN FOOD IS SAFE TO CONSUME.

ANIMALS

Never let pets or farm animals enter areas where food is grown including vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. Waste left behind can contain disease causing pathogens that can easily mix with crops. Similarly, do not feed wild animals, including birds, near these areas.

WATER

Make sure the water you use to irrigate crops is from a safe source. Water from a municipal or public water system is generally safe to use as public water suppliers perform regular water quality testing. If you use a potable groundwater well for your water source, it is recommended that a standard water test be conducted periodically to help ensure you are using a safe water supply. It is not recommended that surface water be used on crops.

GARDEN LOCATION

Locate your edible garden away from manure storage, compost bins, septic systems, solid waste, dumpsters, animals, pets and storage areas where hazardous materials, fertilizers or pesticides are stored. Runoff, spills, or cross-contamination from any of these areas could create an unsafe food source.



COMPOST AND MANURE

Aged manure is not the same as composted manure. Although pathogens are known to die over time, it is not safe to assume that all pathogens in aged manure have been eliminated. Therefore, aged manure should be treated and handled similarly to fresh or uncomposted manures and be kept away from edible crops.

Make sure compost used in your garden has been heated to a temperature above 140°F which is the temperature needed to destroy harmful pathogens. Do not apply fresh or aged (uncomposted) manure to edible gardens. Also, avoid using compost that contains diseased plants or plant material that has been treated with herbicides or pesticides. For more information on Composting, see Fact Sheets 4.7 and 5.5.

LEAD IN SOILS

Lead is a heavy metal that naturally occurs in soils. However, elevated levels can present a health risk, with young children being especially vulnerable. The most common form of lead exposure is through inhalation or ingestion of dust and chips from old paint containing lead, but lead can also accumulate in plants. Roots and leafy green vegetables are particularly at risk which is why soil testing is recommended. It's always a good idea to complete annual soil testing for nutrient management and most county extension soil tests include a total lead level or lead screening. Although low levels of lead in soil generally won't present a health risk, higher levels may require special precautions such as peeling root crops before consumption, removing leafy vegetables from your garden and in some cases, selecting a different area altogether for your edible garden. Contact your local NRCS extension office for assistance.

FOOD HARVEST AND STORAGE TIPS

- Always wash your hands before handling food
- Use clean, food-grade containers to place and store your harvest in
- Never harvest or handle food when you are sick
- Produce that needs refrigeration should be stored at 40°F or lower
- Produce stored at room temperature should be stored in a cool, dry, pest-free area
- Always wash fruits and vegetables with clean water prior to preparation and consumption



BACKFLOW PREVENTION

Backflow is the reversal of the flow of water into the drinking water system. It occurs when there is a drop-in pressure, allowing for anything connected to the water system to flow back into it. For example, pesticide and fertilizer sprayers that are attached to garden faucets or hoses can release these chemicals into your clean water supply if a pressure drop were to occur (e.g., from a broken water line, or large water use nearby). This can be prevented with the use of a backflow prevention device. These are widely available at most hardware stores and should be installed on all outside faucets and hose connections to prevent water supply contamination. You may actually be obligated to have such devices under your local plumbing code. Contact your city or town hall for more information.



WATER QUALITY BENEFIT

Food safety starts with good housekeeping practices and sanitation throughout your hobby farm. Keeping a clean and well-organized hobby farm can go a long way in your overall success and help ensure that potentially harmful materials are kept out of nearby water resources.