



COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

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Lead Hazards and Vegetable Gardening

Due to heavy usage of lead in gasoline and paint, much of the soil in New England is contaminated with lead. Home gardens provide Vermonters with a wonderful hobby and a source of home grown vegetables. Here are some general tips to help protect your family and keep lead hazards to a minimum while gardening. There are ways to garden and be safe. Here are some suggestions:

Vegetable Garden Location

- Locate gardens at least 4 feet away from any older painted buildings and avoid planting vegetables in greenbelt gardens.
- Use raised beds consisting of new lead-free soil.

Soil Composition

- Maintain a high pH level in soil. Acidic soil (low pH) increases the solubility of lead, thus increasing the likelihood of the plant absorbing the lead. Liming, fertilizing and composting will raise the soil pH and prevent lead absorption.

Which Vegetables should you plant?

- Leafy vegetables such as lettuce, Swiss chard and mustard greens absorb high levels of lead. Leafy vegetables may contain up to seven times more lead than root vegetables. Sunflowers also absorb high levels of lead and can be used to remediate the soil. Seeds from these plants should be disposed of and not eaten.
- Fruiting vegetables absorb less lead than other types of vegetables. Tomato, sweet corn, squash, eggplant, and peppers are all safe choices for home gardens.
- Wash all vegetables, especially root vegetables, before eating or cooking to remove all dirt.

For more information about lead poisoning and how to protect yourself and your family, please call the Burlington Lead Program at 802-865-5323.