

Preserving Food at Home After Flooding

Floodwater can bring raw sewage, heavy metals, harmful bacteria, oil and chemicals into your garden and contaminate your produce making it unsafe to eat. There is an increased risk of E. coli, Listeria, Vibrio, Salmonella, Hepatitis A and Norovirus when eating produce from a flooded kitchen or garden. Consider these guidelines when determining if you can safely preserve your food after a flood.

Preserving Flood Contaminated Produce

If produce is unfit for consumption because of floodwaters, do not can or preserve using another method.

Produce that remained above flood water and is intact can be eaten. There is a higher risk to keep and use a preservation method for flood contaminated fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw later on. The risk depends on many factors including the source of the floodwater, time to harvest the produce and if the contamination will go into the plant tissue. Cooking will kill bacteria in the food that will make you sick, but it will not improve the quality of the produce or remove the risk of any potential chemical contaminants. If deciding to keep the produce, keep in mind cleaning, sanitizing and cooking the produce before preserving and eating is the safest option when feeding higher risk populations such as older adults, immunocompromised individuals, pregnant women and young children.

Types of Produce and What You Can Do:

- Citrus Fruits: Clean and Sanitize before preserving.
- Melons, sweet corn and other produce with a protective outer skin: Clean and sanitize before removing outer shell, skin or husk. You may preserve by canning or freezing if cooking is possible.
- Potatoes, carrots, apples and other firm produce: Toss and do not preserve any produce with bruises, cracks or other blemishes as bacteria could collect there. If blemish free, clean, sanitize, peel and cook before preserving. You may preserve by canning or freezing if cooked.
- Leafy greens: Toss and do not preserve. It is not possible to clean these because bacteria could collect in their ridges and crevices.

- Soft fruits such as berries: If the soft fruit can be cooked, you may freeze or can them. Toss if they cannot be cooked because they are too difficult to clean the silt and other contaminants off.
- Plants where fruits have set (tomatoes) or flowers are evident: Clean, sanitize and cook before canning or freezing. Toss and do not preserve any plant with bruises, cracks or other blemishes as bacteria could collect here.

How to Sanitize Canning Jars

- Remove labels. Paper can harbor dangerous bacteria.
- Wash jars and cans in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush.
- Immerse containers for 10 minutes in a solution of 2 tablespoons chlorine bleach per gallon of room temperature water.
- Air dry before opening

Produce should not be dehydrated, as the temperature of home dehydrators is not high enough to destroy bacteria that can make you sick.