



June 18, 2021

As per Winnebago County Health Department, the current suggestions (6/17/2021) are to wash any produce from the garden very thoroughly and wear a mask when working with your plants/disturbing the soil in your garden or farm. Best practices may change as more information is shared.

If you are working in an area that you feel has been effected by fire, use best practices. This includes washing your hands-face after working in the area, remove your boots-clothes before returning indoors, and take other appropriate steps to keep the ash and debris particles outside to reduce dust accumulation indoors.

Please note that the impact of drought may show symptoms on your vegetables and fruits that you may have not seen previously. Furthermore, disease, insect damage, and other physical symptoms are common in the growing season every year. Every growing area is different.

Should I....

- **Get a soil test?** An immediate soil test would not be recommended as we do not have recommendations for what a homeowner-grower would need to test for. Many standard soil testing labs focus on nutrients, soil pH and organic matter, and would not include test for potential fire related chemical contaminants. The closer your growing area is to the fire, the greater that risk is and a soil test for specific compounds may be recommended in the future.
- **Replace soil?** As we still are unsure of the testing that should be done for your soil, we cannot in good faith suggest that you should or should not replace the soil.
- **Replant vegetable garden (annuals)?** Depending on the growth stage and harvest, vegetables should be okay this season. If your summer vegetables have started to flower in the last couple of weeks (ex. peppers, tomatoes), you are probably okay with letting them continue to grow and harvest from. The greater concern would be vegetables in the middle of harvest.
- **Replant non-edibles/lawn?** These plants should be fine for the duration though recommendations may change in the future as more information is shared.
- **Harvest vegetables?** If you have vegetables in the middle of harvest season (ex. spinach, kale, etc), as per Winnebago County Health Department, you should be okay with thoroughly washing these after harvest.
 - **Additional guidance from Oregon State University Extension:**
 - Rinse produce twice- first outside, second inside

- Peel root crops and strip outer leaves of leafy greens
 - Soak vegetables in 10% white vinegar solution (1 cup vinegar to 9 cups water)
- **Replant perennial vegetables-fruit (rhubarb, asparagus, strawberries, fruit trees)?** Depending on when these are planned to be harvested, these should be okay. A soil test may be recommended in this growing season as more information is shared. If you are in the middle of strawberry harvest, follow guidance in washing vegetables with a white vinegar solution.

This guidance is provided as to what we know right now and may change. Every growing area is different and we recognize that individuals may not have the same comfort level with these recommendations. Use your best judgement when it comes to your area.

Please note that the University of Illinois Extension does not test soil or plant material. We further are unable to diagnose potential damage. For additional guidance and information, you may consider reaching out to Winnebago County Health Department at 815-972-7300 or you can email your questions to: RocktonChemFire@wchd.org. People with fire debris on their property should contact Clean Harbors at 877-552-8942.