



Growing & Eating Fruits and Vegetables on Vacant and Derelict Sites



Introduction

Soils in vacant and derelict land or even domestic gardens have the potential to be contaminated with a range of substances that could potentially pose a hazard to health. These contaminants can include metals, such as lead, zinc, copper and cadmium; as well as organic pollutants such as PAHs and pesticides, or even asbestos.

Not all sites will have any contamination and some sites may have more than others.

This could create a risk for anyone who may wish to grow their own produce on these sites, either through direct contact when working with the soil or when eating any produce grown in the soil.

As an example, Lead in soil can be absorbed into root crops and leafy greens and Lead in dust or soil can settle on surfaces of the plant.

One way of determining whether contamination could potentially be present is to consider the previous uses of a site. 'Green field' sites that have never been developed are not likely to have any issues with contamination; whereas sites with previous industrial uses may well have a hidden legacy from these historical uses.

Glasgow City Council Environmental Health can advise on the previous uses of a site and therefore, whether there is the potential for any contamination to be present.

However, any potential risks can be reduced by following some simple, common sense guidelines:

- Always wash hands after working with soil, especially prior to eating, drinking, smoking or handling food;
- Gloves should be worn to reduce contact with the soil;
- Wash work clothes to remove dust and dirt after working with soil;
- Take off your shoes at the door to avoid tracking soil into your home;
- Due to the higher potential for young children to ingest or come into contact with soil it's recommended that young children are not left unattended.

Preparing Fruits and Vegetables

Dust or soil can settle on to the surfaces of the plant. Following these guidelines will prevent or reduce your exposure to the soil:

- Wash all home-grown produce before eating it;
- Soak leafy greens in cool water and rinse thoroughly before cooking. This is particularly important for greens that grow low to the ground;
- Scrub root vegetables with a clean brush to remove all traces of dirt. It is recommended that root vegetables such as carrots, turnip or potatoes are peeled before eating;
- Wash the edible portion of fruiting crops such as tomatoes, courgettes or apples before eating to remove any soil adhered to the outside skin or peel.

Additional Information

Guidelines on how to avoid introducing potential contamination to a site:

- Avoid adding ash to the soil as a conditioner;
- Avoid bonfires on site;
- Avoid using insecticides and pesticides on site that may contain Arsenic.

It is also possible to avoid any potential issues with contamination through the use of raised beds/planters or containers. These can be filled with clean soil or compost and their use avoids contact with soils on the site itself.

It is possible to buy ready made raised planters or containers, but they can also be readily made.

For further information please contact:

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