



Food Safety Basics: How Pathogens Are Spread

People

People can carry human pathogens; and if we can carry human pathogens, we can also spread them! Our hands touch almost everything that happens in the garden, so hand washing regularly and effectively is key to preventing spread of pathogens.

Water

Bacteria LOVE to grow and multiply in water! Water is a common vector of human pathogens, spreading it from one source to another. Always use clean water, like city water or well water that is tested for E.coli, to reduce the risk for water spreading pathogens. Ensure clean water does not become contaminated through safe water practices: do not lay or drag hose nozzles on the ground, do not dump wastewater near water sources like wells or hydrants, do not allow water to pool or flood areas in or near the garden, and use clean watering cans.

Animals

Animals are another source of pathogen spread because they, too, can carry and spread human pathogens. Animals cause contamination when they walk through, munch on, and poop in food production areas. Try to deter animals away from gardens, always monitor for signs of animals before harvesting, and do not harvest poopy produce!

Soil Amendments

What we put in our soil matters for food safety! Amending soil with animal products, such as raw animal manure, introduces pathogens into the soil that can then contaminate produce. Feed the soil with composted manure, or apply raw manure in the fall then wait until the spring to plant.

Tools

Tools used in the garden can spread pathogens because they touch so many surfaces in the garden. Tools come into contact with the people using them, the soil, water, and the plants! Clean garden tools, including planting tools, weeding tools, harvest tools and containers often.

Transportation

Produce that we've taken such care to plant, grow and harvest safely can become contaminated during transport. Prevent this by harvesting into clean containers, then close with a lid or other cover on its journey from the garden to where it will be stored, sold, donated, or prepared.