

Underground Vegetables: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers¹

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Underground vegetables are grown under the soil. They typically are exposed to the microorganisms that are found in the soil. Did you know that fresh produce can cause foodborne illness if not handled properly? This is especially true during the summer months when risk for all foodborne illness increases. Here are steps that you can take to reduce your risk of foodborne illness from underground vegetables.



Where You Shop:

- Buy underground vegetables that are **not** bruised or damaged.
- If you buy vegetables in fresh-cut form, be sure they are refrigerated or surrounded by ice.

At Home:

- Fresh underground vegetables that need refrigeration (carrots, beets) should be refrigerated promptly. Sweet potatoes or Irish potatoes do not need refrigeration.
- All underground vegetables should be refrigerated within two hours of peeling or cutting.
- Leftover cut underground vegetables should be discarded after two hours at room temperature.

During Preparation:

- Wash hands with hot soapy water before and after:
 - handling fresh produce
 - handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
 - using the bathroom
 - changing diapers
 - handling pets
- Wash underground vegetables with cool running water just before preparing or eating. **Don't use soap or detergents.**
- Scrub underground produce, such as potatoes and carrots, with a clean produce brush. Rinse with cool running water.



1. This publication is FCS8746, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published: November 2002. Reviewed: March 2009. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

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- Pay particular attention to underground vegetables that are consumed raw.
- Cut away bruised or damaged areas before preparing or eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry, or seafood (see box below).
- Sanitize kitchen sink frequently to avoid a build up of microbes.
- **Don't cross contaminate!** Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce. Do not mix unwashed underground vegetables with other clean fruits and vegetables.
- If you can, use separate cutting boards for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.
- Use a cooler with ice or ice gel packs when you take perishable foods outdoors. This includes cut fresh fruits and vegetables.

To sanitize cutting boards, dishes, and utensils:
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Mix one teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart water.
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Pour the mixture onto all surfaces or submerge appropriate items into the above solution and let sit at least one minute.

Rinse surfaces well with hot running water.

Counter tops can be sanitized by using the above solution mix, sanitizing sprays or wipes as an additional safety measure.

Following these steps will help reduce your risk of foodborne illness from fresh cut produce.

For More Information:

Visit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at: <http://www.fda.gov> or call FDA Consumer Inquiries at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (a toll-free number).