



GOOD SOIL PRACTICES & STRATEGIES FOR GARDENING IN THE CITY

Compiled by Chicago Asian Americans
for Environmental Justice



MINIMIZING CONTACT

- ≈ Wear gloves & wash your hands after working in soil & before eating.
- ≈ Don't track dirt from the garden into the house.
- ≈ Thoroughly wash produce with filtered water before storing or eating.
- ≈ If you grow root crops or leafy greens: scrub/peel root crops, & remove outer leaves of leafy vegetables.
- ≈ Moisten soil when gardening to reduce airborne dust.
- ≈ Avoid touching your mouth while gardening.
- ≈ Wear a dust mask to reduce contaminated soil ingestion & absorption while digging.
- ≈ Shower after gardening to remove soil.
- ≈ Wash garden tools outside.
- ≈ Store designated gardening clothes outside.
- ≈ Wash clothes after working with soil. Wash garden clothes outside by hand or in a separate load.
- ≈ Don't compost plants grown in contaminated soil.
- ≈ Don't allow children to play in uncovered soil where lead exceeds 300 ppm.

GARDEN PLACEMENT

- ≈ Build plots away from roads, railways, & old buildings.
- ≈ Build a hedge or fence to reduce windblown contamination from streets or other contaminated areas.
- ≈ Locate gardens away from old buildings.
- ≈ Survey the property for potential lead hazards.

MAINTAINING SOIL

- ≈ If contamination is between 300 ppm & 400 ppm, grow fruiting crops rather than leafy greens & avoid root crops.
- ≈ Cover bare soil with mulch or other materials to reduce soil dust deposits.
- ≈ Use soil amendments to maintain neutral to higher pH (above 6.5). Phosphorus fertilization, organic matter additions, & biochar also reduce lead availability.
- ≈ Add topsoil or clean fill from certified soil sources. Use barriers such as landscape fabric or plastic sheeting between the original site soil & added uncontaminated soil/compost.
- ≈ Use raised beds or containers filled with uncontaminated materials.
- ≈ Remove the top 3-5 cm of soil in raised beds & replace it with compost each year. Compost significantly dilutes lead concentration in contaminated soil.
- ≈ Replace contaminated soil with uncontaminated soil.
- ≈ If you're concerned about irrigating with lead-contaminated water, you can attach a lead filter to your garden hose and/or use a rain barrel (but be aware of contaminants from the roof/catchment surface).

SOIL TESTING

- ≈ Wind-transported soils can recontaminate sites. Retest every 1-3 years until you understand the pattern, then every 3 years.
- ≈ Soil test for lead & other factors that may affect the availability of lead in the soil, including pH.
- ≈ Screen children for a blood lead level test.

SOURCES CAN BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE. VISIT WWW.CAAEJ.ORG



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