



Lead & Gardening

Fact Sheet

What's the Deal with Lead?

- Lead is toxic to humans. It causes brain damage and other health problems.
- Young children (infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers) are especially at-risk for lead poisoning.
- Sources of lead in the community are primarily lead-based paint and past use in gasoline.
- Once lead gets in the soil, it does not go away.
- The most serious source of exposure to soil lead is by eating of soil or dust. Plants do not generally absorb lead, but soil gets on their leaves and roots.
- Vegetables with highest levels of lead are the surfaces of root vegetables such as potatoes and carrots. Some leafy vegetables such as lettuce can also have high levels of lead.
- *Standard soil lead levels in the State of Michigan are 21 parts per million (ppm).*

What about Grand Rapids?

In 2009, the Healthy Homes Coalition tested three community gardens in the city of Grand Rapids for soil lead content.

All three had soil above the Michigan background levels of 21 ppm:

216 ppm
110 ppm
72 ppm

While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says that soil lead levels below 400 ppm are not hazardous, no lead is good for children.

How to Protect Your Family

- Always wash vegetables before eating.
- Wash hands after gardening.
- Don't wear gardening shoes inside the home.
- Add lime to your soil to maintain soil pH levels above 6.5 to limit lead availability to plants.
- Add organic matter to your soil to bind the lead.
- Don't let your kids eat dirt.