

GreenThumb Safe Soil Gardening Requirements

Precautions with Heavy Metal Contaminants

Prevent heavy metals from entering your food by adhering to the following GreenThumb requirements:

- Grow food crops in containers or raised beds lined with landscaping fabric and filled with clean topsoil and compost (see below).
- Add organic matter such as compost to your soil. Organic particles will bind with metals and help prevent them from being absorbed by your plants.
- Keep pH levels close to neutral and make sure drainage is adequate helps to assure that the contaminants don't move in your soil. Your ideal pH level is between 6.5 and 6.8. If soils contain heavy metals, a pH closer to 7.0 is better.
- Keep play/seating areas and pathways covered in mulch to reduce exposure to the soil.
- Wear gloves when gardening and thoroughly wash hands after gardening. Shake off any excess soil from boots and clothes before going home.
- Thoroughly wash produce and peel root vegetables before eating.

Raised beds



1. Build a raised bed. Your bed can be one level, double level (pictured), or even triple! Fill out a Lumber Request Form at any GreenThumb workshop to get free lumber. Do not use pressure-treated lumber.

2. Line your raised bed with landscape fabric. GreenThumb keeps a limited amount on hand so ask your Outreach Coordinator for some when you're building raised beds.



3. Fill your raised beds all the way to the top with a mix of topsoil and compost. Fill out a Soil Request Form at any GreenThumb workshop to get free soil and compost.

4. Cover the pathways between raised beds and all over the garden with at least 3" of woodchips (larger pieces) or at most 3" of mulch (smaller, partially broken down pieces). You can request woodchips and/or mulch on the Soil Request Form.

5. Every fall or spring, fill each raised bed back to the top with a couple inches of compost and spread a couple inches of new woodchips over the garden paths.



Resources

For more information, fact sheets, and other resources on soil contaminants, visit Cornell Waste Management Institute's Dept. of Crop & Soil Sciences: <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm>

For additional information:

- Review the EPA publication on Growing Gardens in Urban Soils: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-03/documents/urban_gardening_fina_fact_sheet.pdf
- Read the GreenThumb Gardener's Handbook: http://greenthumbnyc.org/pdf/gardeners_handbook.pdf
- Check out the resources on the GreenThumb website: <http://greenthumbnyc.org/publications.html>
- Peruse resources by the NYC Urban Soils Institute: <http://www.usi.nyc/>