

# What Gardeners Can Do: 10 Best Practices for Healthy Gardening

## 1. Use clean soil and compost.

If you are concerned about contamination in your garden soil, consider having it tested by a New York State-certified laboratory.

## 2. Use raised beds.

Build beds deep enough for the roots of your crops, and maintain them by adding compost often.

## 3. Avoid treated wood.

Railroad ties, telephone poles, pressure-treated wood and some painted wood contain chemicals that can get into soil.

## 4. Maintain soil nutrients and pH.

Healthy garden soils have a good nutrient balance and a pH near neutral (6.5 – 7).

## 5. Cover (or mulch) soil.

Use compost, straw or bark mulch in garden beds, and stones or wood chips in paths and non-growing areas. This helps reduce soil splash, dust and tracking of soil home.

## 6. Keep an eye on children.

Make sure children do not eat soil or put dirty toys or other objects in their mouths. Young children can be more sensitive to certain chemicals in soil, such as lead.

## 7. Leave the soil in the garden.

Avoid bringing garden soil into your home. Remove soil from garden tools and harvested vegetables while at the garden, and change your shoes before going indoors.

## 8. Wash your hands.

Wash up after gardening, and have children who play or work in the garden do the same. Consider wearing gloves, and remember to remove them when leaving the garden.

## 9. Wash and/or peel produce.

Wash vegetables thoroughly – especially leafy and root crops, which are more likely to have soil on them. Consider peeling if appropriate.

## 10. Put a barrier under play areas.

Separate children's play areas from underlying soil with landscape fabric or other durable material. Put clean play materials such as sand or wood chips on top. Check the barrier over time to be sure underlying soil isn't mixing with play materials.



Cornell University  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences  
Department of Crop and Soil Sciences



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension  
New York City



Visit us at <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/healthysoils.htm>

**Healthy Soils, Healthy Communities** is a research and education partnership with urban gardeners. For more information on healthy gardening, check out our resources online or contact one of our project partners!

Healthy Soils, Healthy Communities Project:

<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/healthysoils.htm>

NYS Department of Health Healthy Gardening Page:

<http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1301/>

More Resources for Healthy Soils:

<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm>

Fact Sheets:

- ✓ Sources and Impacts of Contaminants in Soils
- ✓ Guide to Soil Testing and Interpreting Results
- ✓ Best Practices for Healthy Gardens

<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/sourcesandimpacts.pdf>

<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/guidetosoil.pdf>

[http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/Soil\\_Contaminants.pdf](http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/Soil_Contaminants.pdf)

### Project Contacts:

*Cornell Waste Management Institute,  
Cornell University*

Contact: Hannah Shayler

Phone: (607) 254-2377

Email: [has34@cornell.edu](mailto:has34@cornell.edu)

*New York State Department of Health,  
Center for Environmental Health*

Contact: Henry Spliethoff

Phone: (518) 402-7800

Email: [henry.spliethoff@health.ny.gov](mailto:henry.spliethoff@health.ny.gov)

*Si requiere más información o tiene preguntas en Español, llame al teléfono 1-800-458-1158 y oprima 1, o comuníquese por email al [lgm01@health.state.ny.us](mailto:lgm01@health.state.ny.us) (Lydia Marquez-Bravo, New York State Department of Health, Departamento de Salud del Estado de Nueva York).*