



Caution: Fire Ash in Home Gardens



Do not use ash from the recent fires as a soil conditioner or fertilizer in your yard or garden. The ash from the fires is not the same as ash from burned vegetation or wood. The ash from fires in areas where structures burned can contain toxic chemicals that can be harmful to health.

Ash from burned structures may have blown and deposited into your home garden or landscaped areas. Rain and storm water runoff can mix with the ash and cause it to spread, even to areas not directly affected by the fires. Even after ash is no longer visible, chemicals from the ash may be present in the soil. At this time, we do not know which specific chemicals are in the ash from these fires.

The following suggestions will limit exposure to ash and protect your health:

- Do not touch ash and always wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, such as an N95 respirator, rubber gloves, rubber boots, long sleeved shirt and pants, when removing ash from your garden or yard.
- Place straw wattles, hay bales, and mulch around burned areas to prevent or reduce the chances of ash and debris from entering your home garden or yard.
- Remove the top 12 inches of garden soil. Replace with clean soil, not affected by the fires. Place ash in plastic bags or other containers to prevent it from being disturbed, and take it to a landfill.
- Use raised garden beds (also called garden boxes) with clean soil as an alternative to removing topsoil.
- Avoid bringing soil that may contain ash into the home:
 - Clean tools, gloves and shoes before bringing them indoors.
 - Put highly soiled clothes in a bag before bringing them indoors and wash them promptly in a separate load.
 - Wash off excess dirt from crops, especially root crops and leafy vegetables, before bringing them indoors.
- Prior to eating, thoroughly wash with water any vegetables, fruit or herbs grown in outside gardens.
- Throw away any fruits and vegetables that were exposed to firefighting chemicals.
- Visually check the stability of trees. Look for scorched bark or burns on the trunk. Any tree that has been weakened by fire may be a physical hazard. Winds are can topple weakened trees.

For more in-depth information about working in potentially contaminated home gardens and landscapes, see the following factsheet by the United States Environmental Protection Agency: [Growing Gardens in Urban Soils](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-03/documents/urban_gardening_fina_fact_sheet.pdf) (https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-03/documents/urban_gardening_fina_fact_sheet.pdf).

