

Weather Extremes Making It Difficult to Write About the Weather

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Last week, I discussed the importance of irrigation, and how to properly water your yard and garden. My plans for this week were to discuss how to calculate the cost of actually watering your property. But that was before we got about 4 inches of rain over the holiday weekend. So, I may hold off on that topic for a few more weeks. Instead, let's look at what the storms may have caused.

The heavy rains physically beat down many plants, bending stems and leaves. Some plants may have been uprooted or bent to the ground. Go ahead and stake those plants upright as quickly as you can after a storm; they may recover and set out new roots.

Hail may have ripped apart leaves and bruised fruit. These wounds provide hundreds of entrances for disease organisms. Go through the garden and remove any damaged plants and plant parts. Then apply disease protectants such as copper or chlorothalonil (Daconil). Copper will protect from bacterial diseases and some fungal diseases, while chlorothalonil will protect from a wide range of fungal infections.

A minor, but predictable, problem we'll see is fruit cracking, especially on tomatoes. During a dry period, fruit growth is slow, even if you are watering. A sudden deluge allows the plant to absorb large amounts of water, which can cause the fruit to quickly enlarge, often faster than the "skin" can stretch. This will result in cracks and splits in the fruit, usually starting near the stem. It's most damaging on fruits beginning to ripen. To prevent fruit rot, harvest these cracked fruit, wash them carefully, and let them ripen indoors.

Some areas of the tri-state had actual flooding. While soggy soils are a nuisance, if your garden was actually covered with flood water, there may be a possible safety issue with eating the vegetables. This depends on many factors, including what stage of development the crop was in, how deep the flood water was, and whether the flood water was contaminated with bacteria.

If flood waters covered the edible portions of your crop, it would be safest to dispose of them. Between overflowing sewers or septic fields, pet droppings, etc., bacterial contamination is a real possibility. Silt and other contaminants may be imbedded in the leaves, petioles, stems, or other natural openings of leafy vegetables (like kale, collards, and Swiss chard) and fleshy fruit (tomatoes and summer squash), and can be difficult to

remove. Produce with a protected fruit or impervious outer skin such as peas, melons, eggplant, sweet corn, or winter squash should be washed and disinfected before the outer shell skin or husk is removed. Then shell, peel, or husk the produce and cook before eating.

For more information on dealing with flooding, drought, or anything in between, contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287.