

UW 2023 Soil Contamination Study Overview

During the summer of 2023, the UW Bothell undertook a study of heavy metal contamination in the produce from Seattle P-Patches and compared those with organic produce from a variety of grocery stores, including food coops. The heavy metals tested were lead, cadmium, arsenic and mercury.

All P-Patches showed some level of heavy metals that were higher than recommended, when eaten at 1 Cup per day. This level of contamination would be found in ALL urban gardens in addition to P-Patches due to urban environmental pollution.

You can read the full study on the website, at BallardPPatch.org. There are specific references to the studies' findings in Ballard on Page 10, and some suggestions for remediation on pages 16 & 17.

The Dept of Neighborhoods (managing Seattle's P-Patches) has reviewed the study, as has the Ballard Leadership Team.

We believe that it's important for everyone gardening at the Ballard P-Patch to have reviewed the study and the recommendations. Each gardener will need to assess their own comfort with the crops which were of most concern. Please note that only certain plots were sampled. This doesn't mean that if your plot isn't listed that it doesn't have a similar issue. We have noted that plots that have had consistent soil building efforts by the gardener over a period of some years, had less contamination than those which did not. This is in line with the recommendations provided for remediation.

According to the study, the question of "should I garden" is affirmed with some caveats. 1Cup per day (the measurement of evaluation) of any single type of produce may be an unlikely amount of consumption for many gardeners. You may want to tailor your crops to your comfort level – and to consider the recommendations for remediation provided in the report, as well as additional resources available on the website and in the gardener's handbook (also on-line). Please reach out to members of your leadership team if you have further questions, we are happy to discuss this study with you. Please note that the free soil testing available through the King Co Extension service does not test for heavy metals.