

THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark



GARDEN HARVEST GALORE, CONSIDER A DONATION

By mid-summer, many Outsiders are enjoying the rewards of tending a home garden through the early summer days. There is nothing quite as delicious as fresh, homegrown garden produce but what if our planting plans yield more than our stomachs can enjoy? Sure, we can turn to neighbors with baskets of garden goodies but they may or may not want so much produce (especially if they have their own extra). Some entrepreneurs may set up a farm stand or go to the farmer's market but that requires additional time, materials, and sometimes permits. Donating extra garden harvests to a local food pantry or other food-centric organization is a great way to extend the bounty to those in our communities that may not have access to fresh produce.

WHY DONATE

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ten percent of American households experienced food insecurity over the course of a year. Food insecurity is defined as being “uncertain of having or unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food”. By the numbers, in 2021, 33.8 million people lived in households experiencing food insecurity, and 5 million were children within these households.



Community members facing food insecurity can experience life-altering effects beyond the discomfort of physical hunger. The constant worry about obtaining enough food can cause mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Children are especially likely to experience negative mental health impacts of food insecurity.

Hunger is distracting and can negatively impact a person's ability to concentrate. Children are especially susceptible to exhibiting negative behavior due to insufficient food. Empty stomachs result in foul moods, hyperactivity, and aggressive behaviors which can result in negative social outcomes. Additionally, schoolwork can suffer potentially resulting in developmental delays, and learning disabilities because of ongoing hunger.

Finally, food is fuel for the body and when quality food is unavailable, health will suffer. People experiencing ongoing hunger may develop chronic diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.



DONATING EXTRA PRODUCE

Many food pantries welcome donations of fresh produce but it is best practice to call prior to harvesting. Contacting the food pantry in advance provides the opportunity to determine that the facility can properly store and distribute fresh produce. If large quantities of garden produce are being donated, is the need great enough at the location to utilize such a harvest or would it be better to donate to multiple locations? It is also a good idea to ask which days of the week and times are best for dropping off a donation. Harvesting and delivering produce right before clients pick up groceries is ideal, so foods are at peak freshness.

Local food pantries can be found through the [Find Food Illinois Community Food Map](#) on the Eat. Move. Save. website. This map allows you to enter your zip code and free food resources in your area will populate. Click the light green food pantries and meal sites icon to view food pantries. In the Quad



City area, River Bend Food Bank coordinates community-wide efforts to end hunger and supports local food pantries.

Neighborhood demographics and cuisine preferences influence produce popularity. Reach out to food pantry managers to learn about the types of produce their pantry guests prefer. Consider reaching out to your [local SNAP-Ed](#) team to assist with connecting and providing produce to food pantries.



PRODUCE TO DONATE

The following is a general list of garden produce most recognizable to most food pantry clients, therefore most useful. These crops are also capable of being stored for a day or two without refrigeration which may be a limiting resource at some food pantry locations. Finally, these vegetables are easy to grow, harvest, and prepare for donation making it easy for the home gardener to share the abundance.

Produce	Preparation
Tomatoes	Wash gently with water to remove the soil.
Zucchini	Wash gently with water to remove the soil.
Winter squash	Wash gently with water to remove the soil.
Potato and Sweet potato	Gently brush off excess soil. Allow potatoes to “cure” for several days before donating. “Cure” potatoes for two weeks at a temperature of 45 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit and 85 to 95 percent humidity.
Onion	Gently brush off excess soil.
Pepper	Wash gently with water to remove the soil. Refrigerate if donating the following day.
Cucumber	Wash gently with water to remove the soil.
Broccoli	Wash thoroughly with water to remove the soil. Refrigerate if donating the following day.
Cabbage	Wash gently with water to remove the soil. Remove one or two outer leaves, leaving protective leaves in place. Refrigerate if donating the following day.



Produce	Preparation
Carrot	Gently brush off excess soil. Cut tops off, leaving one inch of green foliage. Refrigerate if donating the following day.
Beans	Wash gently with water to remove the soil. Refrigerate immediately after harvest.
Garlic	Gently brush off excess soil. Allow garlic to “cure” for 10-14 days before donating.
Kale and greens	Gently brush off excess soil. Refrigerate immediately after harvest.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Am I liable for food donations?

- No, in 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act into law. This standardizes donor ability across all 50 states, the law protects you from liability when you donate to a non-profit, and protects you from civil and criminal liability when donating in good faith if the produce later causes harm to the recipient.

Why should I donate only whole produce?

- Donating whole, uncut food reduces the chance of introducing foodborne pathogens to produce, maintains the maximum shelf-life of food, and makes keeping and distributing the produce easier for pantries.

OUTSIDER ACTION

Try these activities to be more of an Outsider:

- Donate a little or a lot of garden produce to a local food pantry.
- Plan to plant an extra row of produce next year for donation.
- Share information with fellow Outsiders so they might also donate produce.

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