



What is involved if I volunteer for the Garden Advice Line (GAL)?



The Garden Advice Line (GAL) is a collaboration between Milner Gardens & Woodland (MGW) and VIMGA. The public emails gardening questions/pictures to GardeningAdvice.MilnerGardens@shaw.ca and VIMGA members answer these questions. Early in the year, members receive an email from the VIMGA **Gardening Advice Line Coordinator** asking for volunteers. Members who volunteer are assigned a working partner...one is a CMG. In general, answers are expected to be returned to the coordinator in less than a week. Topics are highly varied, so this provides a great opportunity for research and learning. The majority of questions are submitted between March and September. The GAL coordinator is informed, if you or your partner are away at any time and others will be assigned your questions. Every question answered earns 1 *Other Advice Hour** and up to 2 Education Hours, depending on the time spent researching the answer.

Example question

Subject: Question about using compost in my food garden

Hello Master Gardeners,

I have a question for you about using compost in my food garden.

Last spring (so spring of 2024) we had garden beds built and the soil added to them had compost in it. The compost was from a local gardener (so not commercial) and may have had chicken manure in it. I held off on growing food plants in our new garden boxes based on this article:

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/safely-using-manure-garden/>

I am immunocompromised so wanted to be extra careful.

I did plant lots of flowers in the garden boxes last year and still did lots of weeding etc.

I am planning to grow food plants in the garden this summer as the soil with the compost has now had lots of time to decompose. My question is whether the garden tools (ie. Shovel, spade, bamboo stakes etc.) that I used in the garden boxes (with the compost in them) last summer are safe to use this summer? Will the soil that is on the tools also decomposed enough to be safe?

I understand if you can't answer this question...but thought I'd try. If you don't know the answer, do you know anyone who might?

Thank you so much!

Example answer

Thank you for your question. Your decision to wait a year, allowing the compost to thoroughly decompose before planting veggies, was a prudent one. This step even went beyond the guidelines for non-composted manure outlined in the document you sent. Your question about possible cross-contamination of tools used in the garden beds last year is a relevant question. The attached article outlines the importance of regularly sterilizing gardening tools throughout the season and before "putting tools to bed" in the fall. While the article focuses on plant pathogens, there is no reason why it wouldn't apply to human health as well. The article suggests different processes for different sized tools and the considerations when using each. You might consider taking apart small tools that have working parts, such as pruners. If you have further questions, please reach out.

Happy gardening,

<https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/clean-and-disinfect-gardening-tools>

* Other Advice Hour - volunteer hours that are not clinic related.