



Back to Health warning: Wash and cook fiddleheads or risk illness, Toronto Public Health says

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Fiddleheads can prove a delightful addition to any locavore's diet, if, that is, the curled ferns are cooked properly.

Seven cases of illness associated with eating fiddleheads have been reported by residents to Toronto Public Health since the beginning of May, spokeswoman Kris Scheuer said. One case involved a family of four.

Raw or undercooked fiddleheads have been known to sporadically cause unpleasant symptoms of food poisoning since 1994, according to Health Canada. The symptoms typically last for less than a day.

Only a few people have been affected, but their temporary sickness serves as a reminder to the public to wash and cook the seasonal greens carefully and not to eat them raw, Scheuer said.

"It's not that you'll always get ill, we just sent out the message to reduce the likelihood," she said.

The growing season for the ostrich fern sprouts is short, lasting from about the end of April till mid-June. The ferns grow in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes and are typically picked from the wild.

It's not known why the spiralled veggies, nicknamed after their violinlike appearance, can make people ill. Scientists haven't been able to trace any particular toxin to fiddleheads, according to Health Canada, so it's up to chefs to cook them properly.

When done right, they're delicious, healthy and popular among foodies. They taste similar to spinach or asparagus, and have twice as many antioxidants as blueberries, according to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research.

Health Canada recommends washing fiddleheads several times in cold water and removing as much of the papery, brown husk as possible. Then, steam them for 10 to 12 minutes, or boil for 15.

Get rid of the water afterward.

[Click here to read more about Port Colborne's fiddlehead farm, Norcliff Farms.](#)



Fiddleheads are delicious seasonal greens that have more antioxidants than blueberries. But Toronto Public Health warns against eating this veggie raw.

Carlos Osorio/Toronto Star file photo