



Eat Your Pesticides

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Apples topped the Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen" list for having the most pesticide content.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) recently released their 2011 [Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce](#), which ranks fruits and vegetables by their level of pesticide contamination. This is the 7th year the EWG, a nonprofit focused on public health, has compiled the guide based on research conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

To ensure their data accurately embodied a typical consumer's pesticide intake, the USDA and FDA thoroughly washed and peeled fruit and vegetable samples before they were tested, much like one would at their own home. They then [calculated](#) the percent of samples that had detectable pesticides, the percent of samples with two or more pesticides, the average number and amount (in parts per million) of all pesticides found on a sample, the maximum number of pesticides found on a single sample and the number of pesticides found on the fruit or vegetable in total.

The Shopper's Guide lists fruits and vegetables in order of these percentages, and the twelve with the highest pesticide contamination make up their "Dirty Dozen" list.

Apples, America's most popular fruit after bananas, topped the "Dirty Dozen" list this year- pesticide residues were present on 98% of the over 700 samples tested. Second to apples was celery, followed by strawberries, peaches, spinach, nectarines (imported), grapes (imported), bell peppers, potatoes, blueberries (domestic), lettuce and kale/collard greens.

Every sample of imported nectarines tested positive for pesticides, while imported grapes had 14 pesticides detected on a single sample. Strawberries and domestic grapes both had 13 different pesticides detected on a single sample. Peaches were found to have been treated with more pesticides than any other produce, registering combinations of up to 57 different chemicals. And some 96% of all celery samples tested positive for pesticides.

Cilantro just missed the 2011 "Dirty Dozen," coming in 13th in the rankings. Tested for the first time this year, the USDA found 33 unapproved pesticides on 44% of the samples. This is the highest percentage of unapproved pesticide on any produce included in the guide since the EWG started tracking data in 1995.

Conversely, the EWG also released their 2011 "Clean 15," a list of produce with the lowest levels of pesticides. Topping the "Clean 15" is onions, followed by sweet corn, pineapples, avocado, asparagus, sweet peas, mangoes, eggplant, cantaloupe (domestic), kiwi, cabbage, watermelon, sweet potatoes, grapefruit and mushrooms.

Asparagus, sweet corn and onions had no detectable pesticide residues on 90% or more of samples. More than four-fifths of cabbage samples (81.8%) had no detectible pesticides, followed by sweet peas (77.1%) and eggplant (75.4%). Multiple pesticide residues were found to be extremely rare on vegetables low in

overall contamination—no single sample had more than five different chemicals. Fewer than 10% of pineapple, mango and avocado samples showed detectable pesticides, and less than one percent of these samples had more than one pesticide residue.

According to EWG calculations, if you choose five servings of fruits and vegetables a day from the “Clean 15” rather than the “Dirty Dozen,” you can lower the volume of pesticides you consume daily by 92%. While five servings of fruits and vegetables from the “Dirty Dozen” would cause you to consume an average of 14 different pesticides a day, five servings from the clean 15 would result in a consumption of less than two pesticides per day.

Pesticides have been linked to brain and nervous system damage, cancer, hormone disruption, skin, eye and lung irritation, mood problems including anxiety and depression in farmworkers and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in kids. For shoppers who are put off by the cost of organic produce, which is grown without synthetic chemicals or fertilizers, genetic engineering, radiation or sewage sludge, lists like the “Dirty Dozen” can help them to prioritize their organic purchases.

“Though buying organic is always the best choice, we know that sometimes people do not have access to that produce or cannot afford it,” said EWG President Ken Cook. “Our guide helps consumers concerned about pesticides to make better choices among conventional produce, and lets them know which fruits and vegetables they may want to buy organic.”