

Would you like a lizard with that salad?

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Staged gecko in spinach. Photo: Lauren D. Quinn

(HealthDay)—Imagine this: You open a bag of fresh salad greens and out pops a lizard. Or worse.

Unfortunately, that scenario is more common than many might think.

Researchers analyzed [online news](#) between 2003 and 2018 and found 40 articles about U.S. consumers discovering live, dead or severed parts of animals in their produce.

More than half of the cases involved frogs, but lizards, snakes, mice, birds and even a bat were found in salad greens, [green](#) beans or mixed vegetables. Ten of the animals—nine frogs and one lizard—were found alive.

In three-quarters of the cases, the produce was conventionally grown, not organic.

"It was implied over and over in these articles: If you buy organic, getting a [frog](#) is par for the course, essentially," said study author Daniel Hughes, a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Illinois.

"If that was true, we should have seen the opposite of what we found. We did not take into account market-share differences between conventional and [organic produce](#), but this result ran contrary to common opinion," Hughes said in a university news release.

Only one of the incidents—a dead bat found in a package of salad greens in Florida in 2017—led to a recall, according to the study published on July 20 in the journal *Science of the Total Environment*.

It's likely that the findings underrepresent the actual scope of the problem, Hughes added. Consumers may report such incidents directly to stores or produce companies and not to media. Also, stories may have appeared in print versions of newspapers but weren't published online, he explained.

"If we could better track these incidents, it might be possible to detect geographic clusters where frogs or other [small animals](#) are more common, or times of year they're more active. In those areas or times, it might be as simple as changing the crop rotation schedule or the produce variety to one where the [animals](#) can't hide as easily," Hughes said.

He offered this advice for consumers.

"Keep eating fresh produce, especially [leafy greens](#), and if you happen to get a live frog, please don't release it in your backyard," said Hughes. "Keep it as a pet or offer it to a local school for use as an educational tool. Releasing [wild animals](#) is how invasive species start, and could introduce disease into local frog populations. Just don't do it."

More information: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration offers [food safety resources for consumers](#).

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