

Environmental group adds 3 vegetables to its annual Dirty Dozen list

March 22 2021, by Susan Selasky



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Since 2004, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) has released an annual list of fruits and vegetables the group calls the Dirty Dozen, because they're deemed to contain the most pesticides. But there are a

few surprises to this year's list.

While kale has been alone in the No. 3 spot since 2019—the first time it made the list in 10 years—the group added mustard greens and collard greens alongside it. All three are known to be low in calories, high in fiber and have antioxidant qualities. Strawberries are No. 1 and spinach comes in at No. 2 on the list.

Bell peppers, tested for the first time since 2012, and hot peppers (chile peppers), came in at No. 10, knocking tomatoes to the No. 11 spot.

EWG's yearly Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce is based on test data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The group identified, according to a news release, which fresh fruits and vegetables contain the most and the least amount of pesticide residue. You can find the list at www.ewg.org.

Among the findings, the EWG cited included:

70% of non-organic fresh produce sold in the U.S. had pesticides. 20 different pesticides were found in a single sample of the three leafy greens in the No. 3 spot. 115 pesticides—the highest amount—were found on bell peppers.

"Whether organic or conventionally grown, fruits and vegetables are critical components of a healthy diet," said EWG toxicologist Thomas Galligan in a news release. "We urge consumers who are concerned about their pesticide intake to consider, when possible, purchasing organically grown versions of the foods on EWG's Dirty Dozen, or conventional produce from our Clean Fifteen."

The annual report is not without controversy.

What's important to note is that dietitians and health experts recommend that the overall goal is for Americans to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables for a healthy, well-balanced diet.

The Alliance for Food and Farming (AFF), strong opponents of EWG's annual list, says it shows a negative impact on [fruit](#) and vegetable consumption.

"Last year, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) faced significant criticism from the nutrition community for inaccurately escalating and perpetuating consumer safety fears about these healthy foods as our world was locking down due to the pandemic," Teresa Thorne, Executive Director of the AFF said in a news release. "EWG continues to dismiss the needs of consumers and disrespect farmers by choosing to inaccurately disparage the very foods [health experts](#) agree we should eat more of every day to improve immune function, prevent diseases and increase lifespan."

They also point out that the USDA's Pesticide Data Program report finds that 99% of samples tested fell below the safety standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency. Additionally, more than 40% of produce tested had no detectable pesticide residue.

Only one in 10 Americans eat enough fruits and vegetables daily, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC recommends that adults eat 1½-2 cups of fruit and 2-3 cups of vegetables per day.

The AFF also points to studies that found eating 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, may reduce the risk for certain diseases. Another Tufts University study found that prescribing fruits and vegetables would prevent nearly 2 million cardiovascular events such as heart attacks, 350,000 deaths and cut healthcare costs by \$40 billion.

The AFF finds that the EWG's Dirty Dozen list creates fear and disparages consumers from buying—organic or not.

"With only one in 10 Americans eating enough fruits and vegetables each day, we should be promoting consumption to enhance immune function and prevent illness, not discouraging it with tactics like the Dirty Dozen list," Thorne added.

Alexis Temkin, Ph.D., EWG toxicologist, says the group advises that eating a diet that is high in fruit and vegetables, organic or conventional and including frozen and canned, should be a priority.

"There is increasing evidence that low dose chronic exposure to mixture of pesticides may have adverse effects on human health, particularly during sensitive windows of development like pregnancy and childhood," Temkin said in an email to the Free Press.

EWG said they are aware that access and being able to afford organic is not always an option. That is why, they said, the group created its "Clean 15" shoppers guide.

While the EWG's list is based on USDA data, most pesticide residues detected fall within established government levels.

Along with the Dirty Dozen list, EWG releases its list of fruits and vegetables that contain the least amount of pesticides. At the top of that list is the beloved avocado. Also, on the list are asparagus, cabbage, and cauliflower—all known as nutritional all-stars.

To help consumers the AFF provides an easy-to-use risk at safefruitsandveggies.com showing how many servings of a specific fruit or [vegetable](#) one would have to eat without any effect on the highest amount of pesticide residue the USDA recorded.

With bell peppers that would be 196 servings for a woman in one day.

To handle fruits and vegetables safely, the FDA recommends washing them before eating or using.

EWG's list of most contaminated fruits and vegetables

- Strawberries
- Spinach
- Kale
- Collard and Mustard greens
- Nectarines
- Apples
- Grapes
- Cherries
- Peaches
- Pears
- Bell and hot peppers
- Celery
- Tomatoes

EWG's clean 15

- Avocados
- Sweet corn
- Pineapple
- Onions
- Papaya
- Sweet peas (frozen)
- Eggplant
- Asparagus

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Kiwi
- Cauliflower
- Mushrooms
- Honeydew melon
- Cantaloupe

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Citation: Environmental group adds 3 vegetables to its annual Dirty Dozen list (2021, March 22) retrieved 3 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-environmental-group-vegetables-annual-dirty.html>

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