


Handling fresh fruits and vegetables safely

 extension.umn.edu/preserving-and-preparing/wash-fresh-fruits-and-vegetables

Fresh produce may become contaminated with bacteria, viruses and parasites at any point during its farm to table journey. Safe handling of produce can reduce contamination so you don't get sick.

Wash all fresh produce under running, drinking water before peeling, cutting or eating

- **Wash hands with hot soapy water**, for at least 20 seconds, before and after handling fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry or seafood, as well as after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or handling pets.
- **Wash all fresh produce under running, drinking water** before peeling, cutting or eating. The wash water temperature should be 10 degrees warmer than the temperature of any produce being washed to prevent thermal shock and absorption of water and bacteria to the inside cells.
- **Scrubbing with a clean brush is only recommended for produce with a tough rind or peel** (such as carrots, potatoes, cucumbers and squash) that will not be bruised or scratched by the brush bristles.
- **Discard outer leaves of leafy vegetables** like lettuce and cabbage before washing.
- **Do not wash fruits and vegetables with bleach or soaps** - it can absorb into the product and change the taste.
- Wax coatings are used on some produce to keep in the moisture and keep good quality. Wax coatings are safe to eat. Remove the wax by scrubbing with a produce brush under running water.

What about pesticide residues left on fruits and vegetables?

Keep in mind that the health benefits of eating fruit and vegetables outweigh the possible presence of pesticides. The FDA, USDA and EPA strictly control pesticides. If there is any pesticide residue on the fruit or vegetable, it should be under the regulations and safe to eat.

A lot of the pesticides are water-soluble and will come off with water, which is another reason to wash fruit and vegetables before you eat them.

Preparing and storing fresh fruits and vegetables

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The Food and Drug Administration doesn't recommend soaking produce or storing it in standing water.

Wash with a sink sprayer

Fragile items and soft fruits (like strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries) can be washed using a sink sprayer. Place fruit in a colander and gently turn the fruit as you spray with water.

Don't have a sink sprayer?

- Place fragile fruit in a colander and put into a stock pot of warm water.
- Lift the basket in and out of the water several times.
- Change the water and repeat until the water remains clear. Do this quickly because if the fruit absorbs too much water, it will lose flavor, texture and its aroma.
- Be sure to rinse fruit with fresh water after washing it.

Don't wash leafy green salads in sealed bags labeled "washed," "triple washed" or "ready-to-eat"

- They don't need additional washing at the time of use unless specially directed on the label.
- Additional washing of ready-to-eat leafy green salads is not likely to increase safety.
- The risk of cross-contamination from you and food contact surfaces used during washing outweigh any safety benefits.

Do wash produce before preserving or canning

Clean fresh produce before preserving even if it will be peeled.

- Work in small quantities to prevent loss of quality and nutrients.

- Wash produce with clean running water that is close to the temperature of the produce. If the water temperature is too warm or too cold, any bacteria near an opening or cut may contaminate the produce.
- Wash and drain produce BEFORE removing caps, cores, pits, seeds, skins or shells.
- Wash through several changes of clean water in a clean sink. Use water at a temperature close to the temperature of the produce.
- Wash produce with rinds and skins using a vegetable brush under running water.
- Lift produce out of the water so the dirt is washed off and will not get back on the food.
- Do not let produce soak in water.
- Do not use soap or bleach to wash produce. These products may change the flavor and may not be safe to consume.

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