

Karen Telleen-Lawton: The Dirty Dozen of Contaminated Produce

Alternatives include eating organic or choosing those fruits and vegetables on the 'clean list'

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | Published on 06.22.2011 3:30 p.m.



Summer may mean June gloom, but it also heralds bountiful harvests of the best fruits and veggies. The farmers markets, great in any season, are lush with an explosion of color, fragrance and extravagant quantity. The domain of fruits and veggies are where health and taste dovetail in perfect harmony — or maybe not.

The [Environmental Working Group](#), a public health advocacy group, burst that bubble last week by listing, for the seventh year, the best and worst produce in regards to pesticide contamination.

The so-called Dirty Dozen list is the produce that makes up a typical American family's fresh produce drawers in the refrigerator.

In order of worst contaminated in 2011:

1. Apples
2. Celery
3. Strawberries
4. Peaches
5. Spinach
6. Nectarines (imported)
7. Grapes (imported)
8. Sweet bell peppers
9. Potatoes
10. Blueberries
11. Lettuce
12. Kale/collard greens

The EWG, which analyzed data from the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) and the [Food and Drug Administration](#) to produce the report, found that apples had pesticide residue even when peeled and washed. They hypothesized that more pesticides and fungicides were added to apples after picking to improve the shelf life. Pesticides are known to be toxic to the nervous system, cause cancer, disrupt hormones and cause brain damage in children and unborn babies.

There are alternatives. One is to skip fresh produce and stick with processed foods. This could cut your food bill (debatable) but surely would worsen the trend toward obesity, which is now complicit in the lowering of life expectancy in women. So let's discard that one.

The second is to buy all organic. This won't cut your food bill at first, but given a few weeks might remind your taste buds how good real food is. In theory, maybe you'll eat less because the fresh, natural food is more satisfying. (I'm still trying to convince my stomach on this one.)

We have found that the demands of keeping up with our weekly [Community Supported Agriculture](#) means vegetables have become center stage in our household, even though we're not vegetarians. Internet sources have helped me use spices to turn side dish veggies into interesting main dish combinations.

Thirdly, you can reduce the volume of pesticides you consume daily by 92 percent, according to the report, just by switching to the clean list. To make the cut, produce had to measure pesticide-free in at least 90 percent of the samples when they were ready to eat.

1. Onions
2. Corn
3. Pineapples
4. Avocado
5. Asparagus
6. Sweet peas
7. Mangoes
8. Eggplant
9. Cantaloupe (domestic)
10. Kiwi
11. Cabbage
12. Watermelon
13. Sweet potatoes

- 14. Grapefruit
- 15. Mushrooms

Gotta go. The pungent aroma of cabbage and sweet potato soup is making me hungry. With a generous portion of asparagus on the side, we'll have a perfect supper for a foggy evening.

Cabbage and Sweet Potato Soup

Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large pot and add:

- 1 cup of sliced leeks
- 4 small sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 2 cups of shredded cabbage

Add to pot:

- 1 clove garlic
- 1 bay leaf
- 3/4 teaspoon of crushed thyme
- 3 sprigs of parsley, chopped
- 4 to 5 cups of vegetable or chick stock
- Salt and pepper lightly

Bring to a boil, reduce heat, then cover and simmer until potatoes are very tender (30 minutes or more). Correct salt and pepper, remove bay leaf. Puree in food processor.

Return to pot and keep warm. Place 2 tablespoons of Swiss or gruyere cheese in bottom of each soup bowl, pour soup over and serve.

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. Graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: The Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon at www.CanyonVoices.com.*