

Pesticides and You

News from the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP)

One in a Series of NCAMP "How-To's"

Reducing Pesticide Exposure From Eating Fresh Produce

As conventional markets promote cosmetically perfect produce, agribusiness becomes more dependent on the use of many different pesticides to deliver visually beautiful goods that are free of defects and scars. Many common garden vegetables and fruits are sprayed repeatedly with contact and systemic pesticides, and some are even treated while they travel to market.

Since some pesticides are systemic (absorbed by the plant and translocated throughout), consumers should realize that it may be impossible to avoid all residues on food. However, here are some ways to reduce low-level exposures to pesticides.

- Always wash hard-skinned produce in a mild soapy solution, rinsing with plain water afterwards, to reduce surface residue levels.
- Remove the outer wrapper leaves of leafy vegetables, such as cabbage and lettuce, and discard, as these have probably received the most recent pesticide applications.
- Peel wax coatings, which can protect pesticide residues. Waxes are commonly used to enhance cosmetic appeal and reduce water loss which can cause shrivelling. A number of fungicides may be added to waxes to help prevent spoilage during transit. To get rid of waxes, the consumer has little choice other than to peel produce,

which unfortunately reduces the vitamin content.

What more should consumers do?

- Whenever possible, buy *bona fide* organic produce, which is likely to contain lower levels of pesticide residues.
- Avoid purchasing imported foods, which may contain residues of pesticides banned or severely restricted in the United States.
- Buy locally and avoid purchasing out-of-season produce that often is transported long distances.
- Never use non-organic citrus peels when preparing food, as these may contain pesticide residues and dyes.