



## **ARE YOU TAKING HARMFUL STEPS TO CLEAN YOUR PRODUCE?**

How do you clean your fruits and vegetables? Do you simply rinse with water before eating? Or, do you feel you need something else to get your produce squeaky clean and free of pesticide residue? If you use products like soap, bleach, or vinegar, you're not alone.

A recent survey distributed by a Georgia-based produce wash manufacturer revealed that nearly 40% of consumers use something other than water to ensure their fresh fruits and vegetables are clean. However, many of the products typically used to clean vegetables are non-food grade and could be potentially harmful to you and your family.

The survey of more than 250 consumers was aimed at finding what motivates consumers to buy produce cleaners. Those surveyed were asked how they clean their fruits and vegetables.

Approximately 60 percent of participants reported that they use running water only when washing fruits and vegetables, while 22 percent use soap and water. Branded produce cleaners and vinegar each accounted for 6 percent of respondents; while bleach, other methods, or nothing at all each accounted for 2 percent.

Despite FDA suggestions to wash with water alone, consumers obviously want to take extra steps to ensure their produce is clean and safe. After all, we don't wash our hands with only water.

But these consumer habits raise a critical health issue: while it is important to make certain fruits and vegetables are clean of potentially harmful residue, cleaning produce with substances not made for human consumption could cause more harm than good. Soaps and other chemicals do not necessarily cut through the wax on fruits and vegetables. Most standard cleaning products are simply not designed for that purpose. Instead, added chemical residue may remain from the cleaner, and even be absorbed into the produce itself.

According to The Partnership for Food Safety Education, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public about safe food handling and preparation, detergents and bleach are not labeled safe for use on food. Consumption of these products can lead to such illnesses as diarrhea and nausea. Meanwhile, other homemade, edible



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washes using ingredients like vinegar and baking soda can leave a residual aftertaste.

For the large portion of people who take additional steps when preparing their fruits and vegetables, produce cleaners specially formulated for this purpose are the best solution. Fruit and vegetable washes, especially those that are all natural and made of food-grade ingredients such as citrus, corn, and coconut extracts, are designed to safely and effectively cut through wax to rid produce of most hidden pesticides, chemicals, and soil.

Even foods typically assumed to be safe may not be as clean as consumers believe. Organic produce may still carry a light coating of water-resistant wax, trapping soil, residue, and even chemical substances. Another common misconception is that peeled or sliced foods, such as oranges or watermelon, do not need to be washed before using. In fact, knives, peelers, and other kitchen utensils often transmit trace amounts of soil, pesticides and chemicals into the 'meat' of the food during the cutting or peeling process.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are important to a well-balanced diet; and all-natural produce cleaners can help ensure that produce is clean, safe and free of harmful chemical residue. Many major retailers across the United States carry produce cleaners; ask about them in the produce department of your favorite store. Natural washes can also be purchased online at a variety of "green" retailers and eco-friendly companies. To ensure that a produce wash is both safe and effective, inspect the label carefully and look for the words "all-natural," "100% natural," or "made only from natural ingredients."

Using a special wash for produce may seem an extra step in an already busy day; but those few extra seconds can make a difference when it comes to food safety.