

# Pocket Guide to Pesticides

The [Environmental Working Group](#) has just released their updated [Shopper's Guide to Pesticides](#). Based on 87,000 tests for pesticide residues in produce conducted between 2000 and 2007 by the US FDA and USDA, they list the 12 worst and 15 best foods to consider in an effort to limit your exposure to pesticides, which, despite rinsing and peeling, can only be avoided if they are grown using organic methods.

**“Those who eat the 12 most contaminated fruits and vegetables consume an average of 10 pesticides a day. Those who eat the 15 least contaminated conventionally grown fruits and vegetables ingest fewer than 2...”**

The “dirty dozen” foods are peaches, apples, bell peppers, celery, nectarines, strawberries, cherries, kale, lettuce, imported grapes, carrots, and pears. They recommend you buy these items as organics if you can, or not at all.

The “clean 15” foods are onions, avocados, sweet corn, pineapples, mangos, asparagus, sweet peas, kiwis, cabbages, eggplants, pappayas, watermelons, broccoli, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes. The methods in producing these foods, even if they're done using “conventional,” modern farming practices, are thought to be safe.

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# In Season Now : Peaches

Stores are selling peaches at a cut-rate price now. Sweet and juicy, now's the time to think about canning some so you can have that flavor all autumn and winter, too.



Look for the best you can find ... firm, but that have a fragrance. Even if they're a little under-ripe, they'll ripen at home, unmolested by squeezey shoppers. (One firm squeeze is enough to bruise them.) To ripen at home, place your peaches in a paper sack with a couple of ripe bananas. These will exude ethylene gas, which triggers the peaches to ripen even more quickly than they normally would. Ripening can happen in as little as 12 hours, so buy enough so you can keep tasting one to test for sweetness.

I wouldn't start with anything less than 10lbs of peaches, since it's not worth the trouble to work with any less. And resist the temptation to use nectarines.. even though most

people dislike the furry skin of a peach – we'll be skinning them – nectarine flesh tends to stick hard onto the pit.

Wash the canning jars in the dishwasher, turning on all the features to make it the hottest, sterilizing wash you can manage. Don't wash the lids with the little rubber rings, though. The heat will compromise their integrity, and could give you a bad seal. Instead, wash these in hot water with some bleach in it, then rinse them thoroughly.

To prepare your peaches, boil a large pot of water, and have a bowl of ice water handy. I worked in batches of 6 at a time, but if you're working with help, you can set up a regular assembly line. Cut an X in the bottom of each peach, just enough to cut through the skin, as you drop it gently into the boiling water, and let them heat up for about 30 seconds. Remove them all to the ice water bath. The skin should satisfyingly peel off. (If at all resistant, just dunk it back into the hot water for a little longer, then into the ice water again.) You can try to cut the peaches into halves, or even the neat little sections you see in industrial canned peaches, but I found it easier to just cut them randomly, in mouth sized pieces, discarding the pit, and any bruised or brown parts – keeping a sharp eye out for any tooth-breaking bits they sometimes leave behind. Toss the cut segments with [Fruit Fresh](#) (powdered vitamin C) or lemon juice to prevent oxidation. Repeat these steps until you've processed all of your peaches.

Now, prepare your syrup mixture. I went with a mixture of apple juice and a little Splenda, and some spices (cinnamon and star anise). I found that one gallon (64 oz.) of juice is enough to fill 12 pint jars mostly full of peach segments. I used three small sticks of cinammon, and 2 whole star anise. Pick good quality apple juice, preferably with the least amount of additives and no sugar added. I used  $\frac{3}{4}$  c of Splenda for a gallon of apple juice, but you can increase or decrease that, depending on the sweetness of your peaches. Heat this to

a gentle boil.

Spoon the peaches into the sterilized jars, leaving a little space at the top. Then ladle the hot apple juice in, covering the top, but leaving a little headroom. Cover and attach the screwtop rings to finger tight.

Once you've gotten this far, you can rest for a little while. Put your biggest pot on to boil, with enough water to immerse your jars with an inch of water over them. When the water is at a full boil, carefully lower your jars into the hot water, and let them boil for at least 20 minutes – longer if you live at altitude. Then remove the jars and allow them to cool. In 24 hours, remove the screwtop rings, and check the seal. If any aren't solid, set those jars aside, and eat them within a week, storing them in the fridge. As for the rest, keep them in a cool, dark area, away from heat sources, for up to 12 months. When you go to eat them later down the road, inspect them carefully when you open them. Any that have obvious signs of decay – mold, smell, etc. – discard immediately.

Here are some links for more information :

[FreshPreserving.com](http://FreshPreserving.com) – the public website of Ball jars and canning supplies, in the business since 1884.

[PickYourOwn.org](http://PickYourOwn.org) – has a great guide, including charts for making different kinds of syrup mixtures, as well as boiling times for the last canning step, depending on altitude.

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**Pick Your Own Produce**

# VA/MD/DC



Last year, I used Google Maps to locate all of the “pick your own produce” farms in the greater Washington DC area. Berries dominate the list (black-, straw-, blue-), but also apples, cherries, and some let you pick your own vegetables, too.

If you’re not a DC local, I encourage you to create your own Google map of these sorts of places near you and link it here!

[Google Maps: Pick your own produce VA/MD/DC](#)