



Washing Your Food

Do you clean your produce before eating, cutting, or cooking with it? If so, how do you clean it? Do you just quickly rinse it under a faucet? Well, you're not alone. Research has shown that 80 to 90 percent of consumers wash their produce in this same way.

Unfortunately, this is not the correct way. Before cleaning your produce, you should make sure that your hands are clean. This means washing your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap.

Using clean hands, fresh produce should be washed under cold running tap water to remove any lingering dirt. Even if you plan to peel the produce, it is still important to wash it first. This reduces bacteria that may be present. If there is a firm surface, such as on apples or potatoes, the surface can be scrubbed with a brush. Consumers should not wash fruits and vegetables with detergent or soap. These products are not approved or labeled by the Food and Drug Administration for use on foods. You could ingest residues from soap or detergent absorbed on the produce.

Cut away any damaged or bruised areas because bacteria that cause illness can thrive in those places. Immediately refrigerate fresh-cut items such as salad or fruit for best quality and food safety. Wash your hands again when finished.

The Dietary Guidelines recommend that meat and poultry should not be washed or rinsed. Studies conducted at several universities indicated that washing can allow bacteria on meat and poultry to spread to other ready-to-eat foods. Remember that bacteria present on the surface of the meat or poultry will be destroyed by cooking to a temperature of 160° F.

The Northeast Iowa Food & Farm (NIFF) Coalition and the Food & Fitness Initiative are working together to create community environments that support access to fresh, locally grown, healthy, affordable food and safe environments for physical activity and play. More information about these programs can be found at www.niffcoalition.org.

Source: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.