By Kylee Baumle

Last week, I was the messenger you wanted to shoo away, because the message was so depressing. Sharing the list of the “Dirty Dozen” fresh fruits and vegetables that are the most contaminated by pesticides isn’t exactly the news you want to read during the season of merry and bright. But, I’m going to make it up to you this week, just as I promised.

The Environmental Work Group also puts out a list called the “Clean Fifteen,” which consists of fifteen fresh fruits and vegetables that are the least tainted by pesticides.

This doesn’t mean that they aren’t contaminated at all; it just means that these are considered to be somewhat safer to eat than those other ones, when buying non-organic produce, because they were found to have low levels of residual pesticides on or in them.

The Clean Fifteen list goes like this: onions, sweet corn, pineapples, avocado, cabbage, sweet peas, asparagus, mangoes, eggplant, kiwi, domestic cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, grapefruit, watermelon, mushrooms. There you go. Eat up.

All of this just begs the question, “Why are some better or worse than others?” Logic says that those things that have a skin that you peel and don’t eat might be safer. And the thicker the skin, the better, but with apples at the top of the Dirty Dozen list, that kind of puts a wrench in that way of thinking. So it’s more involved than that.

In the case of apples, to prevent those darn coddling moths from laying eggs which later hatch out as worms, apples need to be sprayed early in the season and periodically throughout. That means the pesticide has a greater chance of becoming incorporated into the apple as it’s being formed. And since the skin doesn’t keep it out completely, even if you peel your apple, you’re still going to be eating some chemicals. In fact, the USDA and FDA testing was on apples that were washed and peeled.

In the end, the researchers who conducted the testing did not recommend giving up eating any of the higher contaminated fruits and vegetables. They felt that the health benefits of eating these vitamin-rich foods outweighed the risks, but they did advocate choosing organic versions of those fruits and vegetables that you eat the most of.

It's also recommended that you wash produce just before you're going to eat it, rather than ahead of time. It has something to do with the porosity of the surface of the produce.

There's also been some talk about whether organic produce is really better for you or not, and recent studies have shown that there's very little difference in the nutritional value of organic produce and non-organic. But the researchers also said that buying organic is generally preferred because of this pesticide issue.

I'm not sure that having this information will change my way of eating a whole lot. I'm all about convenience and shopping on a budget, and like I said last week, I stick my head in the sand sometimes. But it's certainly worth noting and maybe it will make a difference to you, which is the reason I shared it here.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre. Contact her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.