



The Everyday Guide for Fruit and Vegetables Checking

In accordance with keeping kosher

Ephraim Levine





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INTRODUCTION

The Torah prohibits us from consuming insects. At first glance this appears to be a simple and straightforward mitzvah to keep, after all, who wants to eat insects? However, on closer inspection, this mitzvah may not be as easy as it first appears. Many of the fruit and vegetables that we consume on a daily basis contain tiny insects that fall under the abovementioned general prohibition.

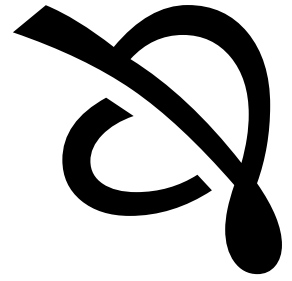
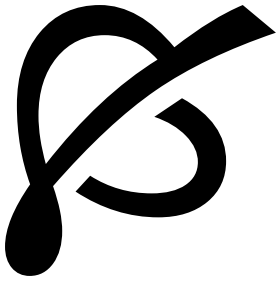
These pages have been written as a general guide on washing and checking certain fruit and veg that are commonly infested, even if only minimally. I have purposely avoided much of the halachic discussion surrounding checking so that the focus can be on method. However, in my view, there is no absolute guarantee that one will never consume little creepy-crawlies, even with the best will in the world. We can only do the best we can, and hope for the Almighty's assistance in keeping us from sin.

The methods in this guide for some fruit and veg are no absolute guarantee for producing 100% bug-free produce. Practically, this means as long as one has washed and checked to the best ability, assuming it is not a fruit of veg that cannot be properly washed and checked to start with, the fruit or veg can be eaten.

The methods outlined in this guide are based on my own experiences. There is no absolute right or wrong with regard to methodology - so if you have a slightly different way of checking and it works for you, then that is good.

I must point out that the washing and checking methods brought in this guide are general. Meaning to say, the methods are the same irrespective of source of fruit or veg and season. One point I will make is that it is advisable where possible to use the best quality produce. Much of my own experience has been with supermarket fruit and veg which generally is of better quality. There is far less infestation in supermarket fruit and veg than market fruit and veg and they employ far better washing methods.

I have kept design and use of pictures as modest as possible to facilitate economical printing where desired.



A Word About Bugs

Veg can be infested in one of three way:

Infestation Level 1. Muchzak b'tola'im - Veg that is by majority found to be infested.

Infestation Level 2. Miyut hamotzui - Veg that is by minority found to be infested.

Infestation Level 3. Miyut sh'eino motzui - Veg that is unlikely to be infested.

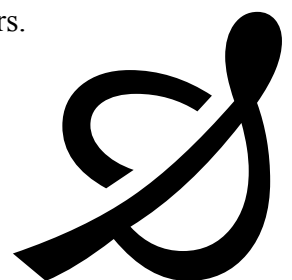
Veg that is **muchzak b'tola'im** refers to veg that is infested most of the time. This means that **most** (more than 50%) vegetables of a particular type are found to be infested when checked, and one is obligated according to Torah law to check that veg before consumption

Miyut hamotzui refers to veg that is infested, but to a lesser degree than **muchzak**. This means that approximately 10% - 50% of vegetables of a particular type are found to be infested when checked, and one is obligated Rabbinically to check that veg before consumption.

Miyut sh'eino motzui refers to a particular type of veg where less than 10% have been found to be infested when checked.

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Rabbi Ephraim Levine is the minister of Watford United Synagogue. He is also employed by the United Synagogue in the kashrut department, KLBD. Views and methods etc expressed in this guide are entirely his own, and do not represent the opinions of KLBD, although certain methods may appear similar. For further information, he can be contacted by email at ephraimlevine@gmail.com. This guide is the result of research over several years.



ARTICHOKES

Infestation:

Artichokes are usually infested and are difficult to check. They cannot be eaten without sufficient checking.

Method:

After boiling, each leaf should be removed and checked in good light for bugs, particularly at the soft fleshy end of the leaf. Artichoke hearts are particularly difficult to check and would require sufficient checking before consuming – it may be best to avoid altogether. Artichoke bottoms though are considered to be bug free and don't require and checking, although they should be rinsed prior to consumption.



BLACKBERRIES

Infestation:

Blackberries are usually infested and are extremely difficult to check. The bugs hide themselves between the individual berries that make up the blackberry.

Checking Method:

Empty blackberries, one punnett at a time, or individually, onto a slightly warmed white dinner plate.

Allow the blackberries to sit on the plate for five minutes, agitating them vigorously in the meantime.

If any bugs appear on the plate, that punnett or individual blackberry should not be used as it is infested.

It is near impossible to properly get rid of all bugs in blackberries and many reliable views do not permit their use.

If no bugs appear on the plate, that punnett can be used after a visual check, in good light, of the outside of the blackberries. Blackberries can be pureed at this point if desired.



BLUEBERRIES

Infestation

Blueberries are generally considered to be bug-free. However, it is not uncommon to find bugs in the 'sunken crown' section at the top of the blueberry.

Method

A visual check of the blueberries in good light will determine if they are bug-free and permitted to be eaten.



BOK CHOY

Infestation

Bok choy, together with other leafy veg like lettuce and some herbs, can be infested with green fly and thrips.

Method

The best method for checking bok choy is to examine each leaf individually in good light. This is best achieved by separating each leaf and holding it up to sunlight or a good quality light bulb. Ensure that each fold in the leaf is properly opened and checked as these areas could harbour bugs.

Extra - If you are unsure of this method, or wish use an additional method to be sure, place separated leaves in a large clear or white bowl filled with warm salty water. Be careful not to place too many leaves per bowl. While soaking, agitate the leaves in the water and rub each leaf between your thumb and forefinger. Remove carefully after five minutes. Examine the water for any obvious signs of infestation. If the water appears to be bug-free, the bok choy can be used. If you notice bugs in the water or you are unable to determine what you see, repeat the process until the water appears bug-free.

***Good Practice!** When removing the leaves, ensure that you remove only a few at a time ideally using just your thumb, forefinger and middle finger. Allow any water dripping from the leaves to drip back into the bowl before entirely removing.*



BROCCOLI

Infestation

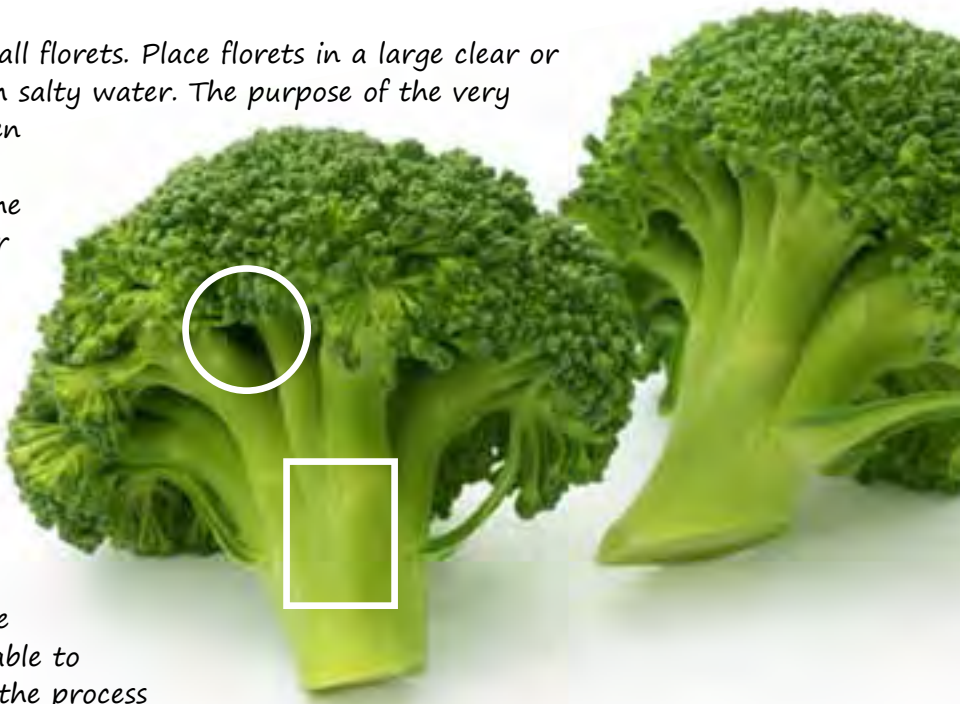
Broccoli is usually heavily infested although this can vary throughout the year. It is near impossible to guarantee an absolute bug-free status for broccoli so if you can avoid its use you should do so.

Method

Break the broccoli down into small florets. Place florets in a large clear or white bowl filled with very warm salty water. The purpose of the very warm water is to soften and open the floret heads as much as possible. While soaking, agitate the florets in the water and rub your thumb across the top of the floret to open them further. Continue to agitate them while they are soaking.

Remove carefully after five minutes. Examine the water for any obvious signs of infestation. If the water appears to be bug-free, the broccoli can be used. If you notice bugs in the water or you are unable to determine what you see, repeat the process until the water appears bug-free.

If bugs are still present after having washed three times, best advice would be to avoid using broccoli altogether.



Important! There are kashrus agencies that recommend not using broccoli at all due to difficulty in properly checking.

BRUSSEL SPROUTS



Brussels cannot be eaten as they are prone to infestation. This is enough to put most off eating brussels altogether. However, if one wishes, the brussels can be separated leaf by leaf and the washing method as outlined above can be used before consumption.

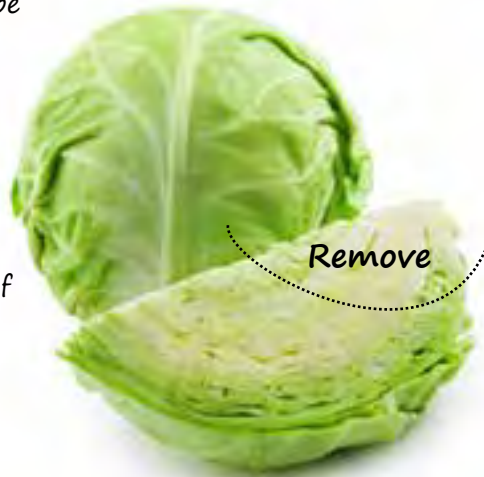
CABBAGE

Infestation

Cabbage is generally clean, although the outer few leaves can sometimes be infested.

Method

If the cabbage has loose outer leaves, these should be removed before inspection. Cut the cabbage in half and then each half in half again. Remove the thick stem from the lower middle section of each quarter so that the leaves can be separated. Check each leaf individually in good light for greenfly or thrips. If you find anything, either remove that leaf or simply wash off the bugs. Ensure that you open any creases or folds on the cabbage leaves as they may harbour bugs.



Further Reading!

There are reliable opinions that say the following: check the first few layers of the cabbage. If only one or two bugs are found, check another layer until you have three consecutive clean layers. The rest of the cabbage can then be used without checking as long as it is tightly packed. It is advisable to rinse the remaining leaves under water.

CAULIFLOWER

Infestation

Cauliflower tends to be infested and will need to be washed and checked before use.

Method

Remove the outer leaves and break the cauliflower down into small florets. Place florets in a large clear or white bowl filled with warm salty water. While soaking, agitate the florets in the water and rub your thumb across the top of the floret to open them further. Continue to agitate them while they are soaking.

Remove carefully after five minutes. Examine the water for any obvious signs of infestation. If the water appears to be bug-free, the cauliflower can be used. If you notice bugs in the water or you are unable to determine what you see, repeat the process until the water appears bug-free.

If bugs are still present after having washed three times, best advice would be to avoid using cauliflower altogether.



CELERY

Infestation

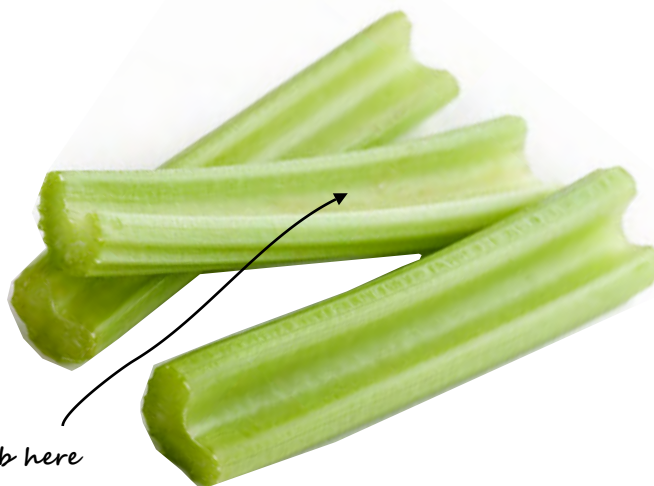
Celery can be infested with greenfly or thrips along the inner ridge as well as the outer ridges.

Method

The inner and outer ridges should be scrubbed with a nail brush, or something similar, while under running water. They can then be used without checking.



Scrub here



CORN ON THE COB

Infestation

Corn on the cob can be infested in two places: on the inside of the outer husk, and in between the individual cobs. Infestation will usually be black thrips so should be quite visible.

Method

Remove the outer husk entirely and check it carefully for any infestation. If thrips are present, this can be a sign of further infestation on the cob itself. Check the the surface of the cob carefully – if any thrips are found, don't use that cob. If clean, place cob in very warm water for five minutes. Remove from water after five minutes and check the water for any obvious sugns of infestation. If the water appears to be bug-free, the corn can be used. If you notice bugs in the water or you are unable to determine what you see, repeat the process until the water appears bug-free. If bugs are still present after having washed three times, best advice would be to avoid using the corn altogether.



ENDIVE



Infestation

Endive is usually clean and doesn't require any checking. Ideally, remove the outer two or three leaves before eating.

FENNEL



Infestation

Fennel is usually clean although it should be checked visually before use.

Method

Remove furry top of fennel with a knife. Carefully separate each layer and check it in good light for thrips or greenfly. If each layer appears clean it can be used without further checking, although it is always a good idea to rinse first.

HERBS (FRESH)

To include: Baby leaf, Basil, Dill, Mint, Parsley, Rosemary, Roquette, Sage, Thyme.

Infestation

All herbs can be infested to various levels and will require washing before use.

Method

Before using the wash method, rinse the herbs in a sieve similar to the one pictured to the left to remove any external debris including earth and bugs. Place the sieve under a good stream of water ensuring it runs freely over all the herbs and runs out through the holes, as pictured below.

Then place the herbs in a large clear or white bowl filled with warm water and a few drops of food grade liquid soap, as pictured to the right. Rinse the sieve under running water at this point.

Be careful not to place too many leaves per bowl. While soaking, agitate the leaves in the water occasionally and rub each leaf between your thumb and forefinger. After five minutes carefully remove the herbs, as pictured on the next page, and place them back into the sieve and place under a good stream of water to rinse off the soap.

Now empty the bowl (which has soapy water in it) and rinse it under running water. Fill it with warm water, add salt, and place the rinsed (soap-free) herbs in the water. Rinse the sieve again under running water. While soaking, agitate the leaves in the water occasionally and rub each leaf between your thumb and forefinger. After five minutes carefully remove the herbs and place them back in the sieve.



Examine the water for any obvious signs of infestation. If the water appears to be bug-free, the herbs can be used. If you notice bugs in the water or you are unable to determine what you see, repeat the process until the water appears clean and bug-free.

Good Practice! When removing the leaves, ensure that you remove only a few at a time ideally using just your thumb, forefinger and middle finger. Allow any water dripping from the leaves to drip back into the bowl before entirely removing.



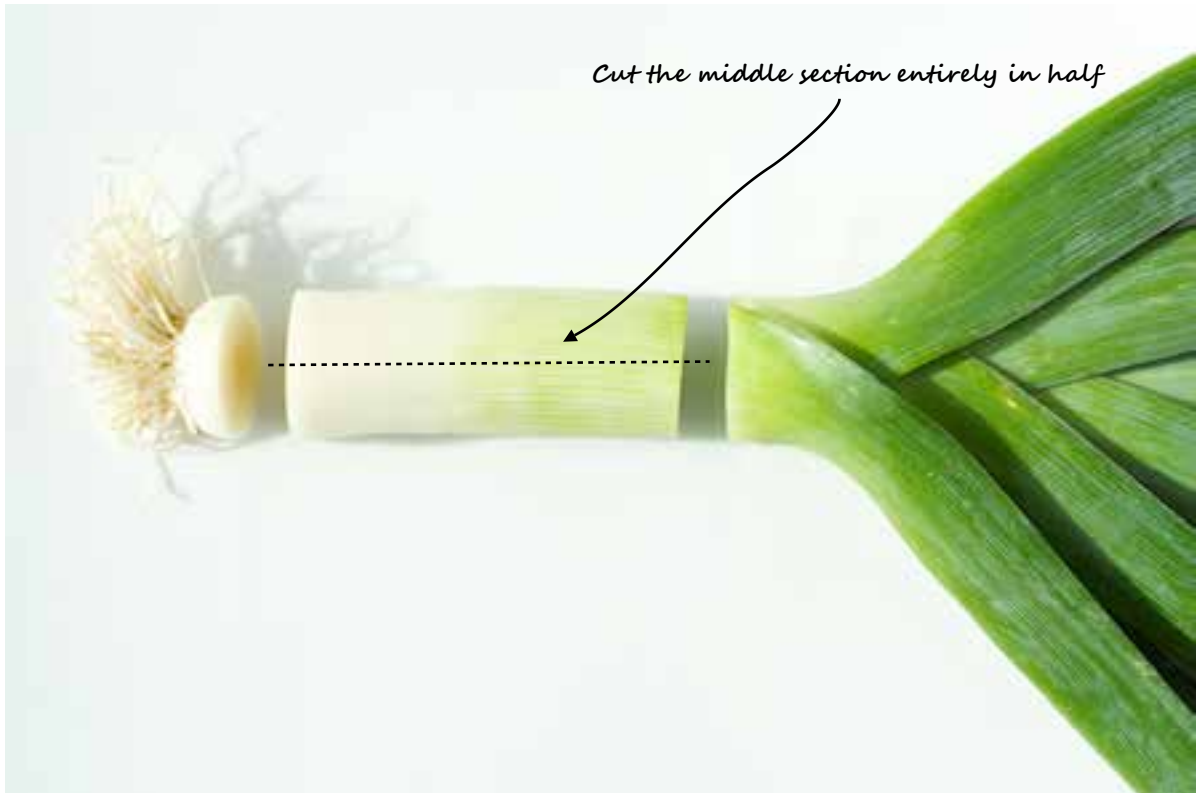
LEEKs/SPRING ONIONS

Infestation

Once the outer leaves have been removed, leeks tend to be clean, although the following method is recommended.

Method

Cut the top and bottom section away leaving just the middle section as indicated below. Cut the middle section entirely in half. Separate each leaf and rinse under running water using the following method: hold the leaf from the top in one hand. Place the remainder of the leaf between the thumb and first finger of the other hand. Under running water slide the second down the entire length of the leaf. After this procedure has been completed, the leek or spring onions can be used. There is a reliable view that says, if the leeks or spring onions are of good quality and tightly packed, the middle section can be used without formally washing.





LETTUCE (ICEBERG)

Infestation

Iceberg lettuce can be infested with greenfly and sometimes black thrips, although infestation is reduced with better quality lettuce.



Method

Separate the lettuce leaves and hold each one up under sunlight or a good quality light bulb. This will allow you to see straight through the thin leaf and identify any bugs. Make sure to unfold any folds or creases in the lettuce that may harbour bugs. Any suspect or actual bugs should be removed or washed off. If after a thorough check, the lettuce leaf appears to be bug-free, it may be consumed.

If you are unsure of this method, follow the procedure for Herbs on page 12.

Ensure that each lettuce leaf is separated and that not too many leaves are place in the bowl together.

Another view: *There are reliable views that suggest the following: check the first four leaves carefully using the above method. If they are bug-free, the rest of the lettuce can be used without checking but should be rinsed under running water before use. If bugs are found, continue checking until four consecutive leaves come up bug-free.*



MUSHROOMS

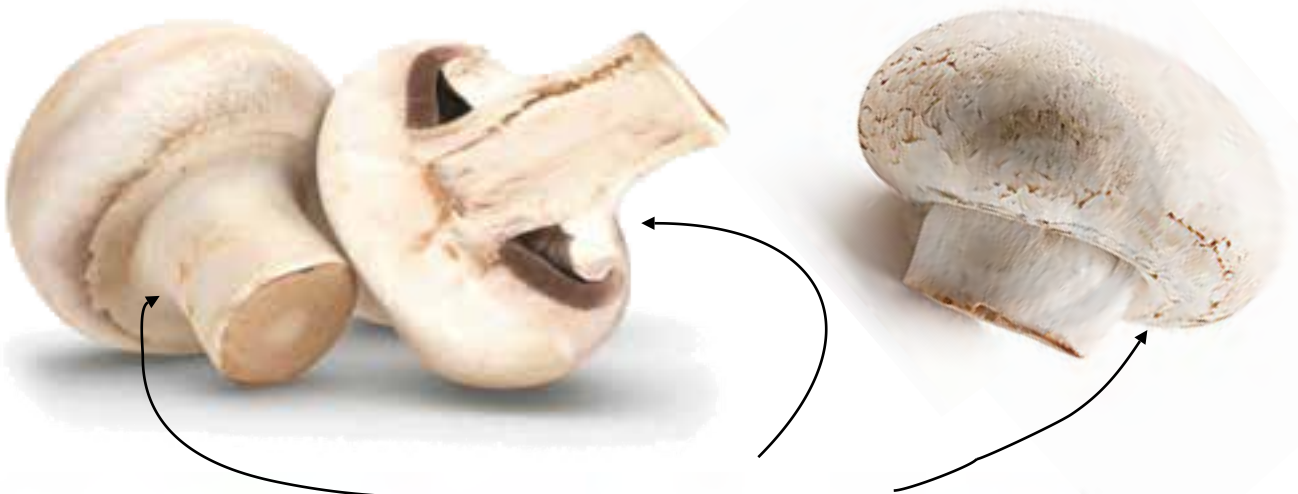
Infestation

Button mushrooms are generally clean and bug-free whilst oyster and portobello mushrooms can be infested.

Method

Closed cap button mushrooms that are entire closed underneath as indicated below should be inspected visually on the outside. If they appear clean they can be used without washing or further checking.

Oyster and portobello mushrooms and other wild mushrooms tend to have infestation in the under gill section. They should either be avoided or, if used, have the under gill section entirely scraped away and they rinsed under running water.



Entirely closed under section. Before cutting open, the under gills are not visible

Under gills of portobello mushrooms should be scraped away before use



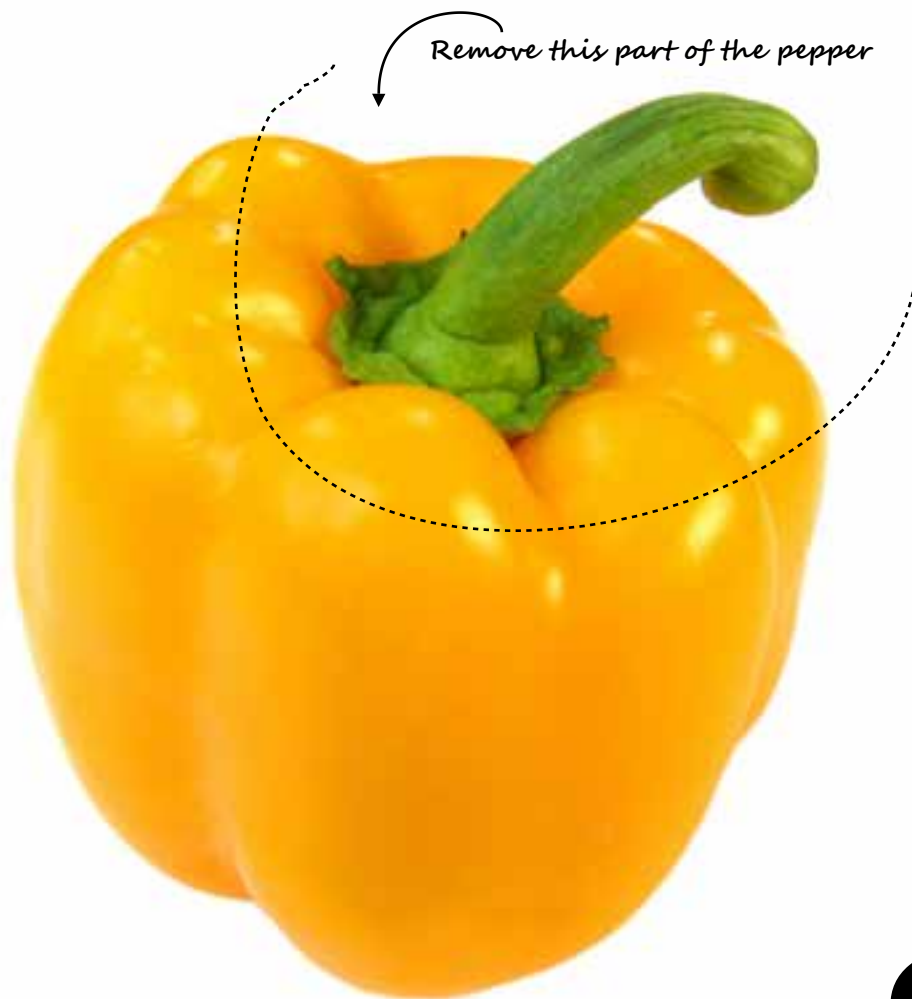
PEPPERS

Infestation

Peppers in and of themselves are bug-free although recently it has come to light that 'beneficial bugs' are added to some crops including peppers.

Method

The outer side of the pepper should be scrubbed with a silver scourer (not steel-wool) while under running water. The top section should be discarded as this part is difficult to scrub. The pepper can now be used without further washing or inspection.



RASPBERRIES

Infestation:

Raspberries are usually infested and are extremely difficult to check due to their delicate texture.

Checking Method:

Empty raspberries, one punnett at a time, or individually, onto a slightly warmed white dinner plate.

Allow them to sit on the plate for five minutes, agitating them vigorously in the meantime. If any bugs appear on the plate, that punnett or individual raspberry should not be used as it is infested.

It is near impossible to properly get rid of all bugs in raspberries and many reliable views do not permit their use.

If no bugs appear on the plate, that punnett can be used after a visual check, in good light, of the outside of the raspberries.

Raspberries can be pureed at this point if desired.



STRAWBERRIES

Infestation:

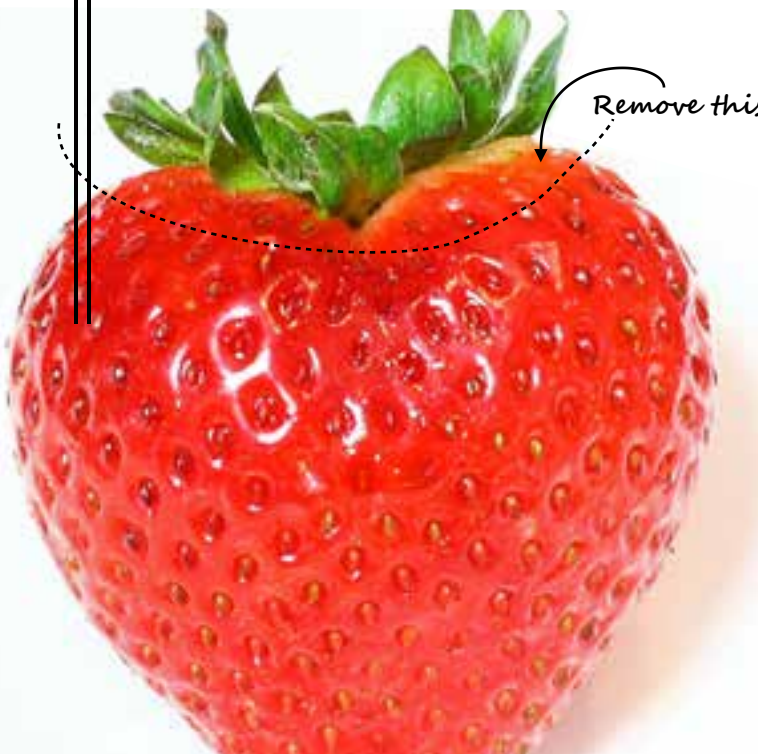
Strawberries are often infested on the outer surface and require careful washing and checking before use.

Method:

Prior to washing, the strawberries should be topped by removing the green leaves including part of the flesh of the strawberry. Merely pulling out the green leaves is insufficient as this may create a hole into which the insects run and hide. After they have been topped, use the method outlined below.

Place the strawberries in a bowl filled with warm salty water. The bowl should preferably be glass or white in colour as this will help in identifying any infestation. Let the strawberries sit for 3 - 4 minutes, stirring the water vigorously but carefully during that time. Rub the outer surface of the strawberries also to help dislodge any infestation. Remove the strawberries carefully and place them into a clean colander. Examine the water for any obvious signs of infestation. If the water appears to be bug-free, the strawberries can be used. If you notice bugs in the water or you are unable to determine what you see, repeat the process until the water appears clean and bug-free.

Extra! After topping the strawberries, brush the outer surface with a soft pastry brush. This will help brush off any loose dirt and infestation. After final washing rinse the strawberries under a strong stream of water.



Remove this part of the strawberry

