

Spend, Scrub or Save

Fruit and veg are expensive, so put your organic dollars where they make the biggest difference, and buy everything else from your local fruit and veg shop. This list is built from Australian residue testing, not overseas lists.

Spend

Buy organic, grow your own, or buy spray-free from a grower you know

Fresh herbs

coriander, parsley, basil, mint, dill

Asian leafy greens

bok choy, choy sum, gai lan, kang kong

Spinach and silverbeet

Lettuce, rocket and salad mixes

Kale

Celery

Strawberries

Blueberries and raspberries

Table grapes

Apples

Peaches, nectarines and apricots

Cherry tomatoes

Cucumbers

Carrots

especially if you juice them

Capsicum and chillies

Snow peas and sugar snap peas

Scrub

Fine to buy regular. Soak, scrub or peel

Pears

Cherries and plums

Tomatoes

Broccoli and cauliflower

Mangoes

Mushrooms

Potatoes

Beetroot and parsnips

Green beans and zucchini

Save

Buy regular and save your money

Avocados

Onions

Garlic

Pumpkin, squash and sweet potato

Bananas

Pineapples

Passionfruit and kiwifruit

Oranges, mandarins, lemons and limes

Watermelon and rockmelon

Sweet corn

Asparagus

Cabbage

Eggplant and radishes

How to wash: soak in a sink of water with about 2 teaspoons of bicarb soda per litre for 12 to 15 minutes, then rinse under running water. Separate leaves first. It lifts much of what sits on the surface (not what has soaked in), so the Spend list still matters.

Spend: where organic is worth it

These came up again and again in Australian testing, and you eat them whole, skin and all. Most residues are still within legal limits, but these are where you can lower your load the most.

Fresh herbs coriander, parsley, basil, mint, dill

About 1 in 3 herb samples in Victorian testing were over the legal limit.

Asian leafy greens bok choy, choy sum, gai lan, kang kong

Insecticides found over the limit in WA, plus residues in NT testing.

Spinach and silverbeet

Insecticides over the limit in WA spinach in both 2013 and 2015.

Lettuce, rocket and salad mixes

Leafy vegetables are among the foods most often over the limit.

Kale

Leafy brassicas are part of the group most often over the limit.

Celery

5 of 21 WA samples had a fungicide over the limit.

Strawberries

Often carry several chemicals at once.

Blueberries and raspberries

95 of 100 punnets carried at least one pesticide residue.

Table grapes

3 of 20 WA samples in 2023 were over the limit.

Apples

99% of Australian apples tested carried at least one residue.

Peaches, nectarines and apricots

About 98% of peaches and 97% of nectarines carried residues.

Cherry tomatoes

8 of the 10 failed samples in WA's 2017-18 survey.

Cucumbers

6 failed results in WA in each of 2013 and 2015.

Carrots especially if you juice them

3 of 21 WA samples in 2023 had an insecticide over the limit.

Capsicum and chillies

Failed WA testing in 2011, 2013 and 2015.

Snow peas and sugar snap peas

17 failed results in WA in 2013 alone.

Scrub: buy regular, then soak, scrub or peel

Pears	None of 52 pears in the latest national survey were over the limit. Wash or peel.
Cherries and plums	No WA cherry failures and one plum failure. Stone fruit is sprayed, so give them a good soak.
Tomatoes	A few WA samples over the limit most years. A soak and rinse is enough.
Broccoli and cauliflower	Single failures in WA in 2017-18 and 2020. Cut into florets, then soak.
Mangoes	Often dipped after picking against fruit fly and rot. Wash before cutting and don't eat close to the skin.
Mushrooms	5 of 11 WA samples failed in 2009, with no newer data. Wipe or rinse quickly.
Potatoes	Stored potatoes can be treated with a sprout inhibitor. Peel, or buy new-season potatoes.
Beetroot and parsnips	Root vegetables: scrub well or peel.
Green beans and zucchini	Thin skins and eaten whole, so wash well.

Save: buy regular and keep your money

Avocados	Only about 1% of samples carried any residue. You do not eat the skin.
Onions	Residues on fewer than 1 in 10 samples, and you peel the outer layers.
Garlic	No WA failures in 35 samples. Choose Australian-grown: garlic from China must be fumigated before it can enter Australia.
Pumpkin, squash and sweet potato	Thick skin, few pests. No WA failures in 21 squash samples.
Bananas	Thick peel. No WA failures in 38 samples between 2009 and 2015; 1 of 20 slightly over in 2023.
Pineapples	Thick peel you do not eat.
Passionfruit and kiwifruit	Thick skins. No WA failures in 41 samples.
Oranges, mandarins, lemons and limes	The flesh is well protected. If you use the zest, buy organic or unwaxed: citrus peel is often waxed with a fungicide, and WA found one over the limit on 3 lemons in 2013.
Watermelon and rockmelon	Thick rind. Scrub the outside before cutting so the knife does not carry dirt into the flesh.
Sweet corn	Protected by its husk. No WA failures in 48 samples.
Asparagus	No WA failures in 29 samples.
Cabbage	Remove the outer leaves and the inside is well protected.
Eggplant and radishes	Consistently low in residues.

Spend less on the Spend list

- **Grow herbs** in pots on a sunny windowsill. They top the list and cost a few dollars.
- **Buy frozen organic berries.** Often cheaper than fresh, and great in smoothies.
- **Buy local:** 99% of WA farm-gate and market produce passed in 2020. Ask “What do you spray?”
- **Peel apples and cucumbers** when organic is out of budget.

Good to know

- “Spray-free” is the grower’s own word. For certified organic, look for a certifier’s logo: Australia has no legal definition of organic.
- Never eat fewer fruit and veg because organic is too dear. The benefits far outweigh the residues.

WASH IT WELL

The bicarb soak

1. Fill a clean sink or big bowl with cool water.
2. Stir in bicarb soda: about 2 teaspoons per litre of water.
3. Separate leaves and break broccoli and cauliflower into florets, then soak for 12 to 15 minutes.
4. Rinse well under running water, rubbing firm produce with your hands or a veggie brush.
5. Dry, then store or eat. Wash berries just before eating so they don’t go mouldy.

In a university study, a bicarb soak removed more surface residue from apples than plain water or a bleach rinse. It cannot remove residues that have soaked into the fruit, which is why the Spend list still matters.

Where this comes from

Australia does not publish a yearly “dirty dozen”. This guide brings together government residue testing from Victoria, Western Australia, New South Wales, the Northern Territory and the National Residue Survey, plus national diet studies and regulator decisions. It will be updated as new results are published.

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2. WA Department of Health, Fruit, vegetables and agricultural chemicals: 2023 monitoring survey (218 samples from large Perth retailers)
3. WA Department of Health, 2020 Fruit and Vegetable Agvet Chemical Survey (232 samples from farm gates and local markets)
4. WA Department of Health, Fruit, Vegetables and Agricultural Chemicals 2017-18 Monitoring Survey
5. WA Department of Health, Monitoring agricultural chemical residue levels in fresh fruit and vegetables (2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015 surveys)
6. NSW Food Authority, Pesticides in berries survey, November 2025 (100 punnets of blueberries and raspberries)
7. Australian Government, National Residue Survey 2024-25 annual datasets: apples (170 samples) and pears (52 samples)
8. Northern Territory Government, NT Horticultural Produce Monitoring Program 2010 (published 2012)
9. Sustainable Gardening Australia, Pesticides in fruit and vegetables (summary of Australian residue data 2000-2011)
10. CHOICE, Strawberries test reveals pesticide health concerns
11. Food Standards Australia New Zealand, The 23rd Australian Total Diet Study (foods bought in 2008, published 2011)
12. Fresh Plaza, Australian authority suspends use of post-harvest avocado and mango insecticide (APVMA dimethoate suspension, 2023)
13. APVMA, Chlorpropham chemical review (registered as a sprout inhibitor for stored potatoes)
14. Australian Government, Biosecurity import conditions for garlic (BICON / MICoR)
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16. Australian Government, Organic and biodynamic produce: the voluntary standard AS 6000 and certification