

VEGETABLES AND INSECT INFESTATION

Introduction

The lives of the Jewish people are governed by our Holy Torah, the Talmud and the Code of Jewish Law. In every aspect of life, from birth to death and after, from awakening in the morning until retiring at night, through both happy and sad times, we are guided and instructed by Al'Mighty G-d.

What is our Source for not eating Insects?

The Torah (Vayikra 11:20-23) states that insects and crawling creatures are not Kosher. Consequently, many vegetables, fruit and other products that are prone to infestation, must be checked and the insects removed. The method of checking and removing insects from vegetables, fruit and other products differ according to each species as will be detailed below.

Insects are so small; does it really make a difference if we accidentally eat one?

Taking care not to consume such creatures tremendously elevates our spirituality, sanctity and holiness. For this reason alone we are worthy of having being taken out of Egypt! (Vayikra 11:45 and Rashi)

This places an enormous responsibility on us as kosher consumers.

How to detect

Checking for insects properly is a very time consuming and tiring procedure that requires a great deal of patience, diligence and Yirat Shamayim (Fear of Heaven).

Even creatures that are so small that only a searching eye can detect them are prohibited. If the reason we can't see them is not that they are too small but rather that they are too elusive, they are obviously forbidden. A concealed creature is still a creature!

However, anything that is microscopic is of no concern.

There is therefore no obligation to use a magnifying glass to check for insects. However, if you see something that you can't identify whether it's a creature or dirt, use a magnifying glass to help you decide. 10-x magnification is best.

Why is it so difficult to find infestation?

It's often difficult to find all infestation. This can be for several reasons:

- Insects are often very small.
- Insects could often be mistaken for dirt.
- Many insects have a similar colour to the vegetable.

- Many insects hide between crevices.
- In some cases, very small worms tunnel into leafy vegetables and can only be noticed by a trail of tunnels.

What doesn't need checking?

The good news is that not all foods need checking for infestation. Anything classified as “rarely infested” may be eaten without checking. Examples: apples, bananas, potatoes, carrots, beetroot.

Also included in this list of “rarely infested” are **industrially** dried chopped herbs. This may sound surprising, as many of these should not be used at all in their fresh state due to extremely high levels of infestation. However, the intensive and numerous procedures of processing and drying these herbs will eradicate all infestation. A word of caution: extended periods of storage can occasionally result in infestation (which you will notice easily with a superficial look over).

Why do the rules seem to change from time to time?

Insect infestation is an area of halacha (Jewish Law) that requires constant research and analysis. Infestation changes from season to season and also from location to location. As we continue to research and learn more about insect infestation, our new understanding of the nature and quantity of infestation in various fruits and vegetables requires that we change the methods or even the necessity to check for infestation. For this reason, the methods in this brochure may differ from what we have previously published.

Who may check for infestation?

Jews over the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah may be relied on to check for infestation if they:

1. know what to look for;
2. know how to check; and
3. have good enough eyesight.

An intelligent child may also check, but preferably an adult should check foods to be eaten by an adult.

A non-Jew may not be relied on to check for infestation even if he or she very dependable.

And if the product carries a Hechsher?

In most instances, a food that carries even a good Hechsher **also needs checking**. This is because the Hechsher usually does **not** cover infestation related issues. It usually only covers other aspects which are not infestation related, e.g. that no non-Kosher ingredients have been added and that the equipment used is Kosher.

Also, infestation can set in after manufacture.

The different processes

Do all vegetables require the same method of checking?

No. There are different ways of preparing insect-free food, depending on the type of infestation and the type of food. Sometimes careful cleaning is sufficient. Sometimes all that is required is a test. And in some cases, we perform a visual check. Let's discuss each of these in general terms to give us a broad picture. The applications of these processes will then be spelt out in each individual case.

Cleaning

Where the infestation is easy to wash off, we simply clean the food. Examples of this are peppers and "Eitan Vaal vegetables". Celery sticks need to be brushed down.

Sometimes detergent is the only way to wash off the infestation. An example of this is cabbage. This is because the tiny insect that often infests cabbage (thrip) grips onto the leaf and can't be washed off. However, after soaking the leaves for 2 - 3 minutes in very soapy water, the leaves become slippery and the thrips lose their grip.

This system isn't effective for all insects. Aphids (greenfly) grip the leaf with their mouth, so they won't wash off in soapy water. However, you can wipe them off by sponging both sides of each leaf using a very soapy sponge. This method can be used for lettuce.

- Cleaning (as opposed to checking or testing) may be done by a non-Jew under the careful and constant supervision of a Jew. This means that non-Jews can do any process that doesn't require the ability to see – as long as you are carefully watching them.

Checking

Where it's possible to visually detect all infestation, we very carefully check the food with the aid of strong lighting. This includes lettuce, baby spinach, and butter beans.

Where aphids are the problem, it's worthwhile to first soak the leaves in a mild salt-water solution (1 teaspoon per litre). This irritates the aphids and often causes them to release their grip. (If the solution is too strong it will kill them before they are able to let go).

Testing

Sometimes we don't examine the food at all. We either shake them over a surface and scan that surface for infestation, or else we examine the water they are washed or cooked in. If this reveals infestation, we don't use the food at all. This is the case where the shape of the food makes it impossible to visually detect infestation and to clean sufficiently well. Examples of this are asparagus, parsley, and some other fresh herbs.