

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

Nov. 14, 2013

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

e-mail: [mkeith@ufl.edu](mailto:mkeith@ufl.edu)

### Why the Wax?

People seem to be noticing the wax on fruits and vegetables more often these days. I'm not sure why, because much of our produce has been waxed for many years. Some folks say they go to farmers' markets in search of produce that does not have the wax on it. Some try to wash it off with vinegar. Others try to scrape it off with a spoon or knife. Some just peel the whole skin off. And the rest eat their fruits and veggies, wax and all.

Why is it there in the first place? Many fruits and vegetables grow and are harvested with their own natural wax. But because of our safety concerns, much produce is washed or scrubbed before being shipped to us. That removes the dust and dirt of the fields or groves where it was grown. It removes the bacteria that came from the air, dirt, harvesting equipment and handling. It removes chemicals from raising it that might still be on the produce. But the washing also removes the natural wax.

Wax is put there by the plant for the purpose of keeping the fruit or leaves from losing their water. When leaves lose their water they wilt. Fruit that loses its water gets soft and punky. You might think that this is just a quality problem, but it is more than that. True, we don't like to bite into a punky apple, or limp cucumbers in our salad.

But in addition to the quality, there's a safety issue. Fruit or vegetables that are soft and limp are going to spoil more quickly, because mold and bacteria will be able to get inside the plant more easily. It's not a good idea to buy limp or soft fruit or vegetables unless that's the way they are supposed to be. Keeping the moisture inside means both better quality and less spoilage. So since we remove the original wax to clean the fruit, putting wax back on is a very good idea.

There's no reason why we should bother trying to remove the wax. All the waxes or coatings used are completely safe and natural. They have all been approved by FDA for food use. We might digest some of it, but most just goes straight through us, almost like dietary fiber.

The two most common waxes used on fruit are carnauba and shellac. Carnauba wax comes from the leaves of the carnauba palms. These grow in northern Brazil. The leaves are harvested and

dried. Then they're beaten and flakes of wax fall off. The wax is collected, melted, filtered and cleaned.

Shellac is wax produced by small beetles that live on trees in Southeast Asia. In India and Thailand the tree bark is scraped to collect the shellac. It too is melted, filtered and purified. Both carnauba wax and shellac are graded for their color and purity before being sold. To be used for food they must meet high purity standards.

No matter how waxy you think an apple or a cucumber feels, be assured that there is not very much wax on it. A pound of wax is usually enough to put a coating on 160,000 apples or cucumbers! You would have to eat tons of them to get any significant amount of wax in you.

But, if you object to it, you can peel the fruit or vegetable. Washing won't remove it, vinegar won't help. Scraping will bruise the fruit underneath before it gets all the wax off. If you do find unwaxed fruit or vegetables, just remember that you need to use them quickly, before they start to get limp. Don't put water on them. Drops of water on the skin will also let molds grow faster. Just keep them in a humid vegetable drawer in the refrigerator.

Here's a simple but elegant way to serve apples. Dress it up with ice cream, vanilla yogurt or whipped topping if you like.

#### Apple Turnovers

4 apples, peeled and diced

1/3 cup sugar

1 Tbsp all purpose flour

½ tsp ground cinnamon

1 pkg (17 oz) frozen puff pastry, thawed

Combine apples, flour, cinnamon and sugar in bowl and toss to mix evenly. On lightly floured surface roll out each sheet of pastry into a 12 inch square. Cut each into 4 squares. Spoon ½ cup of apples onto each square. Fold one corner over to make a triangle and pinch edges together to seal. If desired, brush lightly with melted butter and sprinkle with more sugar and cinnamon. Arrange on baking sheet. Bake at 400° F for 12-16 min. until golden brown. Serve warm. Serves 8.

***Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.***

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.