Over the last decade, people around the globe have doubled their consumption of oils derived from the fruit of the oil palm tree. These relatives of the coconut palms, more familiar to Americans have rapidly come to account for nearly 50% of edible oils used globally and are found in a vast diversity of commercial products ranging from chocolate to chewing gum to dishwashing detergent. The “palm” in Palmolive refers to the oil derived from this protein monocot.

It has become hard to avoid consuming products derived from the oil palm, and this helps to explain the plant’s reputation in some quarters as threat to the global environment. Fairly or not, commercial growers of the oil palm have become anathema to Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund and some other environmental groups. Fairly or not, commercial growers of the oil palm have become anathema to Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund and some other environmental groups.

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