

BUYING ORGANIC FOODS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

By Dr. Cathy

Organic fruits and vegetables are grown without the use of pesticides. They are generally more expensive, and according to research, more nutritious than conventionally grown produce. For example, a four-year EU funded organic food project called the *Quality Low Input Food (QLIF)*, conducted a study that found that organic produce contains up to **40 percent more antioxidants and higher levels of beneficial minerals like iron and zinc**. Milk from organic herds contained up to **90 percent more antioxidants**.

A 2003 study in the *Journal of Agricultural Food Chemistry* found that organic foods are better for fighting cancer. Researchers have gone so far as to say that eating organic foods can help to increase the nutrient intake of people who don't eat the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, helping improve health and longevity.

The public is becoming more informed and educated about diet and nutrition and are aware that organics are a far better choice than conventionally grown foods. The large food chains such as Publix, Kroger, and even WalMart are jumping onto the health food bandwagon, offering a variety of organics.

For many people, however, the cost of buying organic is prohibitive. So what can the average person with an average (or lower) food budget do to incorporate more healthy organics into their diet?

The ***Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce*** is produced by The Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit organization that advocates policies that protect global and individual health. The Shopper's Guide is based on the results of nearly 43,000 pesticide tests. You can download your own **Shopper's Guide** to carry with you in your wallet while food shopping.

Here are some tips you can use to increase the nutritional levels of your diet:

The following 12 foods have the **lowest pesticide load** when conventionally grown and are the safest conventionally grown crops to consume.

12 Foods You Don't Have To Buy Organic:

- Broccoli
- Eggplant
- Cabbage
- Banana
- Kiwi
- Asparagus
- Sweet Peas (frozen)
- Mango
- Pineapple
- Sweet Corn (frozen)
- Avocado
- Onion



The following 12 foods have the **highest pesticide load** when conventionally grown and should be bought or grown at home organically.

12 Foods You Should Buy Organic:

- Peaches
- Apples
- Sweet Bell Peppers
- Celery
- Nectarines
- Strawberries
- Cherries
- Lettuce
- Grapes (imported)
- Pears
- Spinach
- Potatoes

Another thing to look for when food shopping is *GMO, or genetically modified foods*. **ALWAYS AVOID THEM.** Here's how.

Look at the **PLU Code** on the label.

- A **conventionally grown product** carries a 4-digit PLU Code (Ex: conventionally grown banana: 4011)
- An **organic product** carries a 5-digit code, starting with the number 9: (Ex: organic banana: 94011)
- A **genetically engineered (GE or GMO) product** has a 5-digit code, starting with the number 8: (Ex: GE banana: 84011)

Incorporate more organics into your food budget without going broke.

- Buy in bulk
- Form a Buying Club – pool resources with other shoppers
- Follow the 80/20 Rule – 80% of the benefits come from 20% of the purchases
- Buy produce in season
- Choose local foods over organic foods – they are often raised organically and cost less
- Look for local farms and co-ops
- Skip prepared and pre-cut foods – they cost more
- Buy lots of fresh produce – they cost less than canned versions
- Grow your own fresh veggies if you have space. There are many good resources for container gardening if space is an issue.
- Buy organic in the things you eat most

One last note. The most important foods to buy organic are animal, not vegetable, products. Animal foods tend to concentrate pesticides more. For example, non-organic butter can have up to 20 times as many pesticides as non-organic vegetables.

Prioritize your organic food purchases this way:

- Organic meats, eggs, dairy products
- Organic produce

