

Organic vs. Non-Organic

Learn the difference between organic foods and their traditionally grown counterparts. Decide which is best for you, considering nutrition, quality, taste, cost and other factors.

The word “organic” refers to the way farmers grow and process agricultural products. Organic farming practices encourage soil and water conservation, and reduce pollution. Farmers growing organic produce do not use conventional methods to fertilize or control weeds and insects.

CONVENTIONAL

Apply chemical fertilizers to promote plant growth.

Spray insecticides to reduce pests and disease.

Use chemical herbicides to manage weeds.

Give animals antibiotics, growth hormones and medications to prevent disease.

ORGANIC

Apply natural fertilizers, such as manure or compost, to feed soil and plants.

Use insects and birds, mating disruption or traps to reduce pests and disease.

Rotate crops, till, hand weed or mulch to manage weeds.

Give animals organic feed and allow access to the outdoors. Use preventive methods such as rotational grazing, to help minimize disease.

How to identify food that is organically grown...

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established an organic certification program that requires all organic foods to meet strict government standards. Any farmer or food manufacturer who labels and sells a product as organic must be USDA certified as meeting these standards. Producers who sell less than \$5,000 a year in organic foods are exempt from obtaining this certification.

100% Organic	Made entirely from organic materials
Organic	At least 95% organic materials, with remaining ingredients that are approved by USDA.
Made With Organic Ingredients	At least 70% organic ingredients and can display 3 organic ingredients on the label. Cannot use the organic seal.
Non-Organic	If less than 70% organic ingredients, cannot be labeled as organic or use the USDA organic seal.



Is organic food more nutritious?

Probably not, but the answer is not yet clear. A recent study examined the past 50 years' worth of scientific articles about the nutrient content of organic and conventional foods. The researchers concluded that organically and conventionally produced foodstuffs are comparable in their nutrient content.

In addition, organic produce is not as widely available as other produce. That means, depending on where you live, it may be shipped from farther away than non-organic produce and, in some cases, it may sit longer on the shelf before it is sold. During the lag time between harvest and consumption, certain nutrients, such as vitamin C, can degrade within produce, affecting its nutritional value.

Other Factors to Consider...

Pesticides: Conventional growers use pesticides to protect their crops from insects. According to the USDA, organic produce carries significantly fewer pesticide residues than does conventional produce. However, residues on most products, both organic and non-organic, do not exceed government safety thresholds. Most experts agree that the amount of pesticides found on fruits and vegetables poses very little health risk.

Food Additives: Organic regulations ban or severely restrict the use of food additives, processing aids and fortifying agents commonly used in non-organic foods, including preservatives, artificial sweeteners, colorings and flavorings, and monosodium glutamate (MSG).

Taste: Some people say they can taste the difference between organic and non-organic food. Others say they find no difference. Taste is a subjective and personal consideration.

Environment: Some people buy organic food for environmental reasons. Organic farming practices are designed to benefit the environment by reducing pollution and conserving water and soil quality.

Cost: Organic produce often costs more than non-organic. Higher prices are due to more expensive farming practices, tighter government regulations and lower crop yields.

As an alternative to simply buying "organic", or "non-organic", you may want to consider seeking out sources of produce close to where you live. Although buying local fruits and vegetables from smaller farms does not always mean you are buying organic, that is often the case. In addition, the closer to the source of your fruits and vegetables you are, the more likely they are to be fresh. In addition, freshness has a direct impact on nutritional value and taste. An added benefit is that buying locally supports your local economy.

Virtually everyone could improve their health by eating more vegetables and fruit, organic or not. There is not much specific evidence we can point to that shows significant health benefits of organic produce. When you are deciding whether to buy organic products, multiple factors beyond just health considerations may influence your decision. I recommend that you make your choices based on the factors that are important to you.