

Organic foods

What does organic mean? The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) allows foods to be labeled organic that are grown and handled following organic standards. Synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation and genetic engineering may not be used in organic farming. Organic milk, beef, and eggs come from animals raised without hormones or antibiotics, and following feed and grazing rules.

Why buy organic foods?

To avoid pesticide residue. The USDA says that organic produce has significantly less pesticide residue than conventional produce. However, residues on most products whether organic or not, don't exceed government safety thresholds. More research into pesticide residue is needed.

To avoid food additives. Organic regulations ban or severely restrict the use of food additives including preservatives, artificial sweeteners, colorings and flavorings, and monosodium glutamate (MSG).

To support environmentally friendly farming practices. Organic practices are designed to reduce pollution and conserve water and soil quality.

How does the nutritional value of organic foods compare with conventionally grown foods? There is no evidence that organic food is nutritionally superior, although research is ongoing.

Are there downsides to buying organic?

Organic foods typically cost more than conventional.

Organic fruits and vegetables may spoil faster because they aren't treated with preservatives or waxes.

Which foods have the least pesticides?

The 2011 "Clean 15" identified by the non-profit Environmental Working Group includes onions, sweet corn, pineapple, avocado, asparagus, sweet peas, mangoes, eggplant, domestic cantaloupe, kiwi, cabbage, watermelon, sweet potatoes, grapefruit and mushrooms. To save money, buy conventionally grown varieties of these foods since they are low in pesticides anyway.

Which foods have the most pesticides?

The Environmental Working Group's 2011 "Dirty Dozen" list includes apples, strawberries, peaches, imported nectarines, blueberries and imported grapes, celery, spinach, sweet bell peppers, potatoes, lettuce and kale/collards. Consumer Reports adds milk and beef to this list. All of these items are good choices to buy organic if you want to minimize your exposure to pesticides.

Whether you choose organic or not, be sure to:

Eat a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and lean protein daily.

Wash and scrub all produce under running water to remove dirt, external pesticides and bacteria. Note that not all pesticide residue can be washed away.

Buy produce in season whenever possible.

Read food labels carefully. Organic products may still be high in sugar, salt, fat or calories.

from www.mayoclinic.com , www.ewg.org/foodnews and www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/NOPConsumers

Recipe of the Week: Rice with collards

from Jane Brody's Good Food Book

serves 4

2 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
1 cup long-grain brown or white rice
1 teaspoon butter or margarine
3 cups chopped fresh collard greens
freshly ground black pepper to taste

1. Bring broth to a boil in a medium pot. Add rice and butter and stir. Add collards in three batches, stirring after each addition.

2. Return mixture to boiling. Reduce heat. Cover pan. Simmer for 35 minutes (20 minutes for white rice) or till rice is done. Add pepper if needed.

Nutrition Facts:

Calories: 78 Total Fat: 1.5g Saturated Fat: 0.7g
Sodium: 59mg Dietary Fiber: 2g Protein: 3g

Tip of the Week: Practice *random acts of fitness* with a loved one. Choose activities that help you both be active together, such as hiking, walking, or canoeing. Give 'active' gifts such as roller blades or personal training classes. Based on [Random Acts of Fitness](http://www.sparkpeople.com) from www.sparkpeople.com.