

Which fruits, veggies are most important to buy organic?

Missy Keenan, Special to the Register 4:29 a.m. CDT April 20, 2015



(Photo: Special to the Register)

Sheree Clark knows she can't always avoid exposure to toxins in her daily life, but one area she can control is her diet. That's why Clark, a local holistic health counselor, primarily chooses organic, natural food.

"On any given day, I am exposed to things like petrochemicals, exhaust fumes, heavy metals, off-gassing from carpets and furniture, even electromagnetic fields from cellphones," she said. "Many ailments that have increased in recent years have been linked to chemical exposure, including diabetes, reduced fertility, immune suppression, and bladder, breast and other cancers. With all of those toxins coming at me, when I have an opportunity to avoid contaminants, I want to do that."

Clark isn't alone. Although organics are still only four percent of the U.S. food market, sales have been increasing about 10 percent a year for the last few years. The largest share of this market comes from organic fruit and vegetables.

Of course, the main drawback to organic food is that it can cost considerably more than conventional alternatives. (This author once accidentally paid \$18 for a pound of organic cherries from an organic market!) And depending where you shop, organics can be difficult to find.

Each year, the Environmental Working Group creates the USDA EWG's Shoppers Guide to Pesticides in Produce. The guide ranks 48 fruits and vegetables by pesticide contamination level using research from the USDA Pesticide Testing Program and the Food and Drug Administration. The full list is available at EWG.org/FoodNews.

From the list of 48, EWG further narrows down the Dirty Dozen and the Clean Fifteen — the foods most and least likely to contain pesticide residue. If you can't afford to go all-organic, these lists are a great place to start.

The 2015 Dirty Dozen

The 12 fruits and vegetables most likely to be contaminated with pesticide residue:

1. Apples
2. Peaches
3. Nectarines

4. Strawberries
5. Grapes
6. Celery
7. Spinach
8. Sweet bell peppers
9. Cucumbers
10. Cherry tomatoes
11. Snap peas
12. Potatoes

The 2015 Clean 15

The 15 fruits and vegetables least likely to be contaminated with pesticide residue:

1. Avocados
2. Sweet corn
3. Pineapples
4. Cabbage
5. Sweet peas
6. Onions
7. Asparagus
8. Mangoes
9. Papayas
10. Kiwis
11. Eggplant
12. Grapefruit
13. Cantaloupe
14. Cauliflower
15. Sweet potatoes

Tips for going organic



Author, TV host, health coach and raw vegan chef Sheree Clark suggests buying from chemical-free (but not certified organic) growers. She said chemical-free growers found at farmer's markets often subscribe to the same practices as certified farmers, but may be too small to justify the expense of certification. (Photo: Special to the Register)

Want to incorporate more organics into your diet? Here are 10 tips from Clark:

1. Chemicals that were once considered safe may no longer be. "Many approved pesticides were registered long before research linking the chemicals to cancer and other diseases," Clark said.
2. You can't just clean the toxins away. In the research used for the EWG guide, pesticide residue often remained when produce was washed or even peeled.
3. Refer to the Dirty Dozen and Clean 15 when prioritizing which foods to buy organic.
4. Don't assume that organic is always more expensive. Clark said prices for organic produce at farmer's markets are often similar to non-organics, and they can be similar at grocery stores as well. "Recently at the store the price difference between conventional and organic melons was a mere 20 cents per pound," she said. "To me that's a no-brainer."
5. Buy from chemical-free (but not certified organic) growers. Clark said chemical-free growers found at farmer's markets often subscribe to the same practices as certified farmers, but may be too small to justify the expense of certification.
6. Join an organic CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) group. When you subscribe to a CSA, you pay a set price and then receive a share of the farm's produce for that growing season. A Google search for local CSAs lists more than a dozen options.

7. Learn to properly store fresh produce to extend its life.

8. Buy seasonal produce. "For example, asparagus in early spring is abundant, cheap, tender and delicious," Clark said. "In December it is expensive — it can cost \$10 more per pound than it does right now — and not nearly as tasty. I don't eat asparagus in the winter."

9. Organic is just one factor to consider. Chips and candy are still junk, even if they're made from organic ingredients.

10. Organic produce tastes better. Not convinced? "Conduct your own taste test!" Clark suggests.

About Sheree Clark

An author, TV host, health coach, and raw vegan chef, Clark has written and presented on topics ranging from raw food 101 to overcoming career burnout. She hosts "Fork in the Road with Sheree Clark," a weekly television show on KCWI, and counsels health and nutrition clients in her private practice. Learn more about Clark at www.fork-road.com (<http://www.fork-road.com>).

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