

Why Buy Organic Food



Organic food: the latest marketing fad, or a way to become a bit healthier? Most food is sprayed with chemicals, injected with hormones or altered in some other way. They say ‘you are what you eat’, so should we continue to eat this contaminated food or go for a food source where nature rules?

Why should we buy Organic Food?

Officially, organic food is grown (or reared) without the use of chemical pesticides or routine use of antibiotics, and must not be genetically modified. It must display a mark of certification, the Soil Association’s being a very well-known example. Supporting the organic food movement will add force to it, and be good for you and your family too! Organic food may cost a few pennies more, but our health is priceless and so is the biodiversity that organic farming supports.

Better for Farming

Organic farming methods promote sustainability and ethical production. An organic farm will have the manure spread back on the fields, and not be drenched in fertilisers that will contaminate local watercourses. Only 32 of the 290 EU-permitted additives and chemicals may be used on certified organic food, which avoids the chemical fertilisers, sewage-based sludges, additives and radiation which may be applied to non-organic produce. Animals are allowed to grow at a normal rate, instead of being fed growth hormones to rush nature.

Better for Us

Organic food grows more slowly, so the flavour is much enhanced, and a higher flesh-to-water ratio results in higher nutrient content. Vitamin content is enhanced, along with other benefits, such as more essential fats in organic milk than in non-organic milk.

There are caveats, however. Organic lettuce must be grown in the ground, unlike its possibly hydroponically grown non-organic counterpart, but all bagged lettuce may be exposed to high levels of carbon dioxide and ethylene to slow decay, so buy loose organically produced salad, rather than the bagged version.

Better for the Environment

Food miles must be considered, too. Supermarkets centralise their warehousing and distribution, thus increasing the miles our food travels. All organic box scheme veg should come from your local area. Seasonality matters too: as you would expect, out of season vegetables cost more. Peruvian asparagus available in March may be seasonal in Peru, but with the added air miles to fly it in, surely it’s better to wait for our own asparagus season? However, tomatoes grown without greenhouses in Spain and shipped over may still be a ‘greener’ option than those high-maintenance, unseasonal, energy-hungrily hothoused Yorkshire toms. So read the packaging and make your choices according to your personal feelings on the matter.

Why Buy Organic Food?



It's EVERYWHERE!

Supermarkets are selling more and more organic food. The large chains often sell good-quality certified organic produce, and with the UK market worth over £2 billion a year they can't afford to be found lacking so their produce tends to be reliable.

Farmers' markets sell organic produce too, but care must be taken to assure that the produce carries organic certification. Box schemes, ever more popular, are convenient and can be very good value. You can usually choose the content, and the food you eat may incur less 'food miles' than the produce at your local supermarket, as well as being fresher, and good value for money. Box schemes can be adventurous too, and you may come across unexpected new and wonderful vegetables, and so have to learn creative new ways of cooking them.

Even buying just a few organic vegetables can make a difference – non-organic apples need lots of pesticides, and it's very difficult to wash pesticides off root vegetables, so buy organic and just scrub. Pesticides and hormones gather in fat, so organic meats, butter and milk would limit your exposure to these substances. Resist the urge to peel roots, and don't reject oddly shaped vegetables just because they're oddly shaped. They'll have lots of flavour from the stony soil that they grew in and that gave them their unusual shapes. In spite of what supermarkets may have conditioned us to expect, in reality neither vegetables nor fruit are 'meant' to be perfect or regularly sized.

For more information about the certification of organic food, visit www.soilassociation.org and www.whyorganic.org/