

How to Shop for Organic Foods

The benefits of buying Organic foods are manifold. Two major reasons are: (i) they have no/less pesticides and chemicals than non-organic foods (ii) as harmful chemicals are not used in organic farming, there is minimal soil, air and water pollution.

Get to know what organic really means



The basic definition of organic food is food from crops grown without chemical pesticides and harmful fertilisers or from livestock (meat or poultry) raised without the use of drugs, hormones or synthetic chemicals. Organic practices are also applied to processed products like jam made from organic fruits. For example, if jam is labelled as organic there are many chemicals and additives that are not allowed in the finished product.

A product is considered **legally organic** when

- The product bears the Organic Seal
- The product has been certified organic
- The product contains 95% or more organic ingredients
- When an organic food product conforms to the National Standards for Organic Products

Read labels

Genuine organic products are certified by agents who are accredited by National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies in India. After certification, products get an Organic Seal - the label you can see on the food packets. Looking for the organic label is one of the best ways to make sure you are buying genuine organic products. In addition to organic seal, you may also see the word 'organic' on a product. However, many companies try to trick consumers by putting look-alike labels on packets or use tricky wording, so be aware and do not get fooled.



Check the Price Look Up (PLU) code



When shopping for organic products, you may not be able to find the organic seal at all times. A second option is to look at the PLU codes (numbers) on product stickers.

PLU codes have been used by supermarkets to make check-out and inventory control easier, faster and more accurate. PLU codes are 4 or 5 digit numbers and appear on a small sticker on the individual piece of fresh produce. This number identifies produce items based on various attributes which can include the commodity, variety, growing methodology (e.g. organic), and the size. These numbers are assigned by the International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS) after rigorous review at both national and international levels.

Though not a norm in India yet, sometimes fruits and vegetables that have been imported or are meant for export do land up in the local market and have a sticker on them that can be checked. PLU codes tell you key pieces of information about the produce. However, the practice of supplying this information is voluntary, not mandated by any governing body. Some examples:

- 4 digit PLU codes basically mean grown with pesticides
- 5 digit codes starting with 8 means GM (genetically modified) grown
- 5 digit codes starting with 9 means organically grown

Shop at farmers' markets

Farmers' markets are great sources of fresh local organic produce. Nowadays, local governments/NGOs organise fairs for local farmers who practice organic farming. Some farmers may be making the transition to organic farming but may not be certified as yet. The key to landing good deals at farmers' markets is to ask lots of questions.



Shopping online



There are many online stores offering certified and branded organic products. Many organic food manufacturers also have their websites. They help you locate their store in your area. You can order certified organic food through shopping apps also. These are available for Android phones and Windows phones.

Be aware of greenwashed ‘organic’ products

The market for organic food products is growing at a fast pace. This is good news for genuine companies, but also bad news for consumers as many companies try to cash in on the craze for organic products by:



- Labelling their products as ‘organic’ even if their products are not so
- Using terms on their packaging that consumer often confuse with organic - like ‘natural’ or ‘green’
- Trying to confuse consumers by using packaging that resembles organic packaging

Even if you know about organic products, shopping can be confusing. Do not hesitate to ask questions at the store.

Sources:

<http://organic.about.com/od/organic-tips/tp/Shopping-For-Organics-Real-Organic-Products-For-Consumers.htm>

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<http://www.ifpsglobal.com/Identification/PLU-Codes>