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/ [Nutrition](#)

The Dirty Dozen™ and Clean Fifteen™ lists: Reducing the Sticker Shock

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Have you ever held an organic apple, eyed its vibrant color and plump appearance only to place the apple right back where you found it after you noticed the price? Well, you are not alone. To be clear, the benefits of eating conventional (non-organic) fruits and vegetables far outweigh the risks of not consuming any at all. However, if pesticides are a concern there are budget friendly ways to purchase organic when it counts.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) just published their annual “Dirty Dozen, Clean Fifteen” guides. Their lists offer the important distinction between organic purchases that make sense and those that are simply an extra expense. The Dirty Dozen™ are the top twelve types of produce found to have the highest levels of pesticide residue. In contrast, the Clean Fifteen™ ranks produce with the lowest pesticide contamination. The folks at the EWG suggest buying organic produce from the Dirty Dozen™ list and opting for non-organic when it comes to those on the Clean Fifteen™ list. Their guidance can help reduce pesticide consumption without “breaking the bank”.

What Are Organic Products and How to Spot Them?

Often in the spotlight, organic products are processed or grown under specific standards which minimize the use of synthetic chemicals and genetically modified organisms, also known as GMOs. Producers of certified organic products can tout sustainability of resources, as well. USDA organic products can be spotted by the green or black USDA “Organic” logo if meeting at least 95% of the standards. Those products that fully adhere to organic regulations after certification can use the USDA “100 Percent Organic” logo (1).

Nearly 70% of all non-organic produce in the U.S. show pesticide residue. Pesticide remains are present even after washing, peeling, or scrubbing. These chemicals can be harmful to the body and do remain after processing such as in non-fresh, frozen products (2). For example, imazalil and DCPA fungicides, found in citrus fruits and leafy greens, can cause changes in hormone levels, and can damage the thyroid, lungs, liver, and kidneys. These fungicides are believed to be potential carcinogens (3). Chlorpyrifos, an organophosphate insecticide used in pepper growing, is associated with deleterious effects on brain development in children and linked to developmental disabilities and reduced IQ (4). It is thought that exposure to these chemicals over time can have negative effects on human health and the environment.

Want to Eat Healthy While Spending Less Money?

The price of organic foods accounts for the production and organic standards process. Buying only foods with the organic label can be expensive and out of reach for many of us. Eating healthy and safely, however, does not need to be! Following the suggestions of the EWG is one way to consume fewer chemicals while getting all the nutrients needed to nourish your body and optimize your health.

You may also consider visiting Farmer's Markets and Greenmarkets throughout NYC. Here you can interact with farmers and ask about their growing practices. Local producers often use fewer pesticides and tend to follow sustainable environmental practices. Buying from them is also a way to support the local community (5).

If you are enrolled in SNAP, consider the Health Bucks initiative. This program offers an extra \$2 for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables for every \$2 spent up to \$10 using the EBT card at NYC Greenmarkets. Health Bucks coupons can also be used at GrowNYC Fresh Food Box sites, where fresh seasonal produce boxes are available at various price points (\$14, \$17 or \$20) and offered at half price for SNAP customers.

The Lists

Dirty Dozen™ – buy organic from this list:

1. Strawberries
2. Spinach
3. Kale, Collard and Mustard Greens
4. Nectarines
5. Apples
6. Grapes
7. Cherries
8. Peaches
9. Pears
10. Bell and Hot Peppers
11. Celery
12. Tomatoes

Clean Fifteen™ – choose non-organic:

1. Avocados
2. Sweet Corn
3. Pineapple
4. Onions
5. Papaya
6. Sweet Peas (frozen)
7. Eggplant
8. Asparagus
9. Broccoli
10. Cabbage
11. Kiwi
12. Cauliflower
13. Mushrooms
14. Honeydew Melon
15. Cantaloupes

Additional Resources

NYC Farmer's Markets Map: <https://a816-healthpsi.nyc.gov/NYHealthMap/home/ByServices?services=6>

Community Supported Agriculture and Community-Run Farmer's Market Map: <https://www.justfood.org/value-chain-map>

Health Bucks: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/health-bucks.page>

GrowNYC Greenmarkets and Farm Stands: <https://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket/ourmarkets>

GrowNYC Pre-Paid Fresh Food Boxes: <https://www.grownyc.org/freshfoodbox>

References:

USDA Organic Labeling: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/labeling#what%20requirements>

EWG's "Dirty Dozen, Clean Fifteen" List and Guide to Pesticides: <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/summary.php>

More Than Half of Kale Samples Tainted by Possibly Cancer-Causing Pesticide: <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/kale.php>

Largest Chlorpyrifos Producer to Stop Selling the Brain-damaging Pesticide: <https://earthjustice.org/news/press/2020/chlorpyrifos-brain-damaging-pesticide-largest-producer-to-stop-selling>

Why You Should Shop at the Farmers Market: <https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2019/08/09/farmers-market-week-2019/>

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