

COOKING WITH FLOWERS + VASES FOR EVERY BUDGET 77D2

joy of kosher

with *Jamie Geller*

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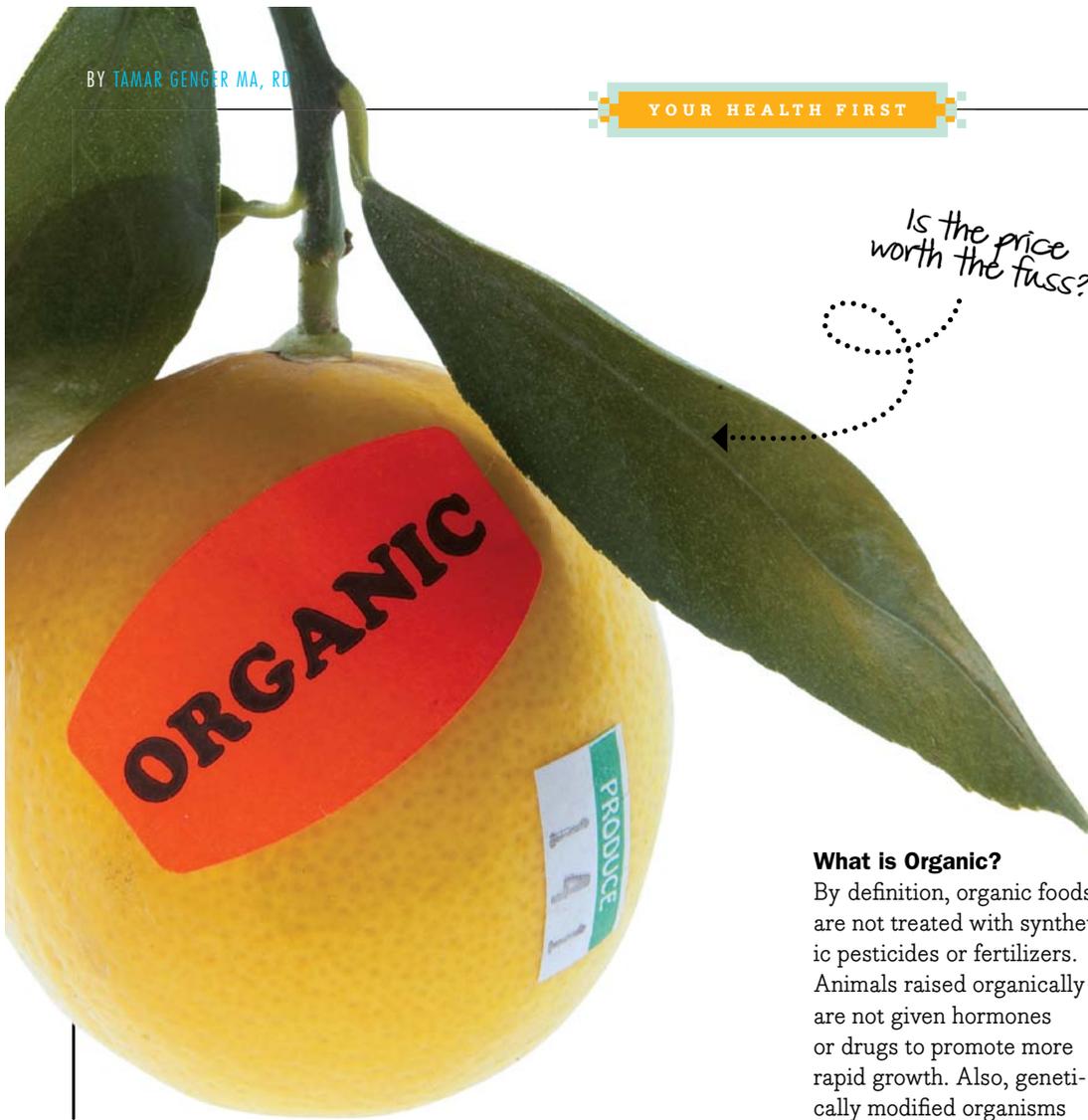
+ *New* recipes with cheesecake batter

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ORGANICS

Organic foods are a big business. The U.S. organic industry grew by 9.5 percent overall in 2011 to reach \$31.5 billion in sales, according to findings from the Organic Trade Association. Organics are also expensive. Ask anyone who has ever spent an afternoon (and a paycheck) at Whole Foods; organic food costs substantially more for fruits, vegetables and meat. Although strong consumer demand has made organics more affordable and available, what does organic really mean? Is it worth the money? There are no easy answers, and dietitians, food scientists, growers and producers have yet to arrive at a consensus.

What is Organic?

By definition, organic foods are not treated with synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. Animals raised organically are not given hormones or drugs to promote more rapid growth. Also, genetically modified organisms are not used on any organic farms. To clarify a common misunderstanding, organic foods may contain pesticides or fertilizers, but they are using pesticides and fertilizers that are natural to the environment.

The United States Dairy

Association (USDA) through their National Organic Program regulates all organic agriculture to ensure they meet the requisite standards. The USDA ensures that all products labeled as organic meet their stringent regulations and offer their organic seal of approval so the consumer will know that the food they buy has been verified organic. Any time you see

the USDA organic seal, it means that the product has at least 95-percent organic ingredients. Sometimes you may see a label stating 100-percent organic, where all the ingredients are completely organic. You may also see a product label without the organic seal that states “made with organic ingredients.” This can only be used on foods that contain at least 70-percent organic ingredients.

SHOULD I BUY ORGANIC?

Recently, a research team

at Stanford University evaluated close to 250 studies comparing the nutrients in organic compared to traditional foods (fruits, vegetables, grains, poultry, meat, and eggs), and discovered very little difference in nutritional content. Although the researchers noted that organic produce had significantly lower pesticide residues, it was unclear what impact that had on consumer health. The data in regards to the ill-health effects of pesticides is inconclusive and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) certifies that the levels of pesticides used on conventional foods are safe.

Proponents of organic

foods argue that organic food reduces exposure to toxic chemicals. Organics have higher nutrients and antioxidant content and promote sustainability for the earth.

“There is a lot of hype about organic foods, but I don’t think it’s as important as people have made



Pasture-Raised Beef

Commercial meat is produced using animals raised in confined spaces and given large amounts of antibiotics to deal with living in such a tight, stressful environment. Many such animals are also fed a diet which focuses on fast growth. Pasture-raised beef on the other hand, are beef that are raised in a natural environment. The animals are allowed to roam free and eat grass. Animals fed on a natural diet lead to healthier animals that do not require antibiotics as they live a natural, stress-free life. For us that means healthier, leaner and tastier meat. Pasture-fed beef is lower in calories, lower in fat (especially saturated fat), has a healthier balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fats, and higher vitamin E content than commercially-raised beef.



What do all the words mean anyways?



There are many other labels companies can use on meat, poultry and eggs, all of which are regulated by the USDA so that they are not used improperly.

The term **“free-range”** – when used in connection with chicken and eggs, means that the chickens were provided shelter in an area with unlimited access to food, fresh water and the outdoors. I hate to dispel your romantic notions of modern farm life; “free-range” seldom means the chickens were roaming about in a huge outdoor space.

“Cage-free” means that chickens were able to freely roam a large building or enclosed area, but did not necessarily have outdoor time.

“Natural” on a label must be minimally processed and contain no artificial ingredients – this applies to meat and eggs only, there are no regulations on the term natural on other products.

“Grass-fed” animals receive a majority of their nutrients from grass, but they are not necessarily organic. Organic animals are not necessarily grass-fed either; they may be supplemented with grain.

“Pasture-raised” has not been clearly defined, so read this label with appropriate skepticism. **J**

it seem to spend the money on organic items. It may be worth it to choose organic for some foods, like apples and bell peppers (and other members of the Dirty Dozen list), which you eat all of, including the skin, but there is no definitive research that shows organic food reduces the risk of disease. At the end of the day it's most important to eat fresh fruit, vegetables, low-fat milk, and lean protein. If you can't afford organic it's better to have non-organic than to have none at all," according to Jessica Fishman Levinson, MS, RD, CDN founder of Nutritioulicious.

I generally recommend buying produce in season and locally whenever possible. If you can grow your own, even better! Whenever comparable in price or on sale, organics are generally preferable. I like to choose organic frozen or canned or dried fruits and vegetables which are often cheaper than their fresh but conventional counterparts.

Every year the Environmental Working Group publishes their Dirty Dozen, the produce with the most pesticide residue (after washing and peeling), so if you are looking to include organic foods in your diet but don't want to break the bank, the 2012 list is a great place to start:

DIRTY DOZEN

- 1 Apples
- 2 Celery
- 3 Sweet bell peppers
- 4 Peaches
- 5 Strawberries
- 6 Imported nectarines
- 7 Grapes
- 8 Spinach
- 9 Lettuce
- 10 Cucumbers
- 11 Domestic blueberries
- 12 Potatoes

The fruits and vegetables with the least amount of pesticide residue make up a list called the “Clean 15”:

CLEAN 15

- 1 Onions
- 2 Sweet corn
- 3 Pineapples
- 4 Avocado
- 5 Cabbage
- 6 Sweet peas
- 7 Asparagus
- 8 Mangoes
- 9 Eggplant
- 10 Kiwi
- 11 Domestic cantaloupe
- 12 Sweet potatoes
- 13 Grapefruit
- 14 Watermelon
- 15 Mushrooms