

Peel or No Peel



There is one major, basic rule of thumb I use to decide if I am going to spend a bit extra and buy organic.

The rule is: Am I going to peel it?

If I am going to peel it, I will likely buy conventional. If I am going to be eating the outer coating (or peel) then I am going to spend, on average, about 15% more and go with the organic version. I think it's worth it.

The item has no peel? Buy organic.

If it has a peel? Buy conventional.

This is even truer if the product I am buying I am going to be eating raw.

For this column, I am focusing on the avoidance of pesticides. If I were to include the topic of GMO's (genetically modified organisms) then the list would be longer of things I want to buy organic. I just wanted to keep this simple.

This topic really revolves around the produce department, and if you are buying fresh produce, I want to commend you. Gone for me are almost all canned vegetables and most frozen ones, too. I

want my produce to be as fresh as possible.

Let's start our tour of the produce department and look at what we'd want to buy organic.

This is my list. It might not be totally comprehensive because while I write this I am in my office and not the grocery store, but you'll get the idea and can apply your learning next time you're at your local grocery. If I listed everything in the produce department this column would be rather long.

FOODS TO BUY ORGANIC

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1

APPLES

One of the most highly contaminated foods, pesticides seep into the core from the stem, making the chemicals impossible to wash off.

2

CELERY

Celery was found to contain 64 different types of pesticides. If you can't find organic celery, buy conventional asparagus instead, it usually ok.

3

BERRIES

That includes blueberries, blackberries, and strawberries. Their thin skin allows chemicals to be absorbed, allowing them to sink into the flesh.

4

GREEN ONIONS

Green onions are grown more for the top part and it's important that they look good, so farmers tend to spray them with pesticides.

5

GRAPES

Grapes tend to mold and attract insects so they are sprayed regularly. And since wine is made from grapes, look for organic wine options, too.

6

PEPPERS

Hot or mild, it doesn't matter. Conventional peppers can contain 75 pesticide residues, including known carcinogens and neurotoxins.

7

NECTARINES, PEACHES AND PEARS

Fleshy fruit with a thin and tender skin? It's been sprayed heavily to keep the bugs away. Buy organic and if you can't, wash it well.

8

CUCUMBERS

If you can't buy organic peel the cucumber and remove the waxy skin. Why? Cucumbers were found to have more than 86 different types of pesticides.

9

TOMATOES

Tomatoes ranked tenth in the list of dirty product and the USDA Pesticide Program found that they carry 69 different pesticides.

10

LEAFY GREENS

Those leafy leaves offer more surface area for pesticides to stick. Also, you can't really "peel" kale or lettuce so you're taking it all in.

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Fruits I buy organic:

- Apples
- Blueberries
- Blackberries
- Strawberries
- Grapes
- Nectarines
- Peaches
- Tomatoes (yep, tomatoes are technically a fruit)
- Pears

Vegetables I buy organic:

- Celery
- Green onions
- Peppers (hot or mild)
- Cucumbers
- Anything leafy: including:
 - Spinach
 - Kale
 - Greens of any kind
 - Swiss chard
 - Lettuce (remember the romaine scare we had recently?)
- Cabbage (you can get away with this one not being organic if you completely peel off the first layer)

So think about it. Do you really need to buy an organic orange or clementine if you are going to peel it? How about that banana? And no one is going to eat the outside of a pineapple, so you can get away with non-organic. Kiwi comes to mind. I peel mine. Wash your hands after you peel the item if you are going to eat it with your hands; especially if you eat your oranges right after you peel them.

My husband obsessively washes all of our veggies before I cut them up. Even if I am going to cook them completely, his goal is to get off the pesticides. There are lots of veggie wash spray products on the market.

Some sources say if you use a light salt water solution that will do the trick to clean them and most agree that about 70-80% of the pesticides are removed with cold water washing by hand. My husband just doesn't trust that this is thorough enough. He wants his veggie wash.

There are a couple of notable exceptions I found as I did some research.

Some find that when asparagus is tested for pesticides it really has very little. For some reason it just doesn't "stick" or maybe most farmers who grow asparagus see no need for pesticides. Many old-school people also peel asparagus. They want to get the little prickly spines off so they peel it right up to the top.

I don't wash mushrooms and they are known to be low in pesticide absorption. I learned from a restaurateur that I used to work for in my 20's that if you wash mushrooms you make them soggy and you wash off some of the nutrients. I just use a brush and get off any residue. I do try to buy them as clean as possible in the first place.

I'll add one other topic in short form. You might consider paying extra for organic meat and dairy. You're not peeling your dairy or your meat but you're eating what they ate. Whatever they were fed or injected with, they ingested, and it became the product you're now eating. So, if they were fed grains treated with pesticides you might want to think twice. I buy organic meat and dairy when I can.

In the effort to make “progress” and “feed the world” our food and farming systems have made compromises and got away from organic growing methods. They see them as advancements. Some of us disagree.

Enjoy!

Cheers,



Grilled Italian Veggies

This is super easy. A great summer entrée that comes together in a flash.