

8 Ways to Save Money on Organic Groceries

Organic food often costs more than conventional fare, but many cooks and wellness experts agree that they pay off in flavor and nutrition, and in health benefits — for you *and* the environment. These tips can help you save money when you opt to go organic.

1. Prioritize produce. Selecting organic is most important when buying veggies and fruits, experts advise, because it will reduce your exposure to herbicide and pesticide residue. Check out the Environmental Working Group's annual Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen lists at www.ewg.org for tips on what to pick — and what to avoid. Opting for organic dairy and meat is next in importance. Pass on organic packaged foods, since they're expensive and highly processed.

2. Buy higher-quality meat — but less of it. Organic, grassfed meat may be near the top of your priority list, but it will cost more. Consider quality over quantity. Or look for less-expensive

cuts — roasts, shanks, ground meat, eye-of-chuck steaks — that might need to cook longer but often have more flavor than prime cuts.

3. Buy seasonal. In-season produce is the freshest, best-tasting choice, and it will often save you money. Farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs) are great sources.

4. Go local. Produce from nearby farms can ripen longer — and therefore taste better — because it doesn't need to be shipped far. Choosing local also saves on transportation costs, reduces the carbon footprint, and supports regional farmers.

5. Cook from scratch. Rather than buying costly premade organic meals, save by purchasing the ingredients and preparing them yourself. Plus, you can make extra portions for lunches or freeze them for another meal.

6. Buy in bulk. Score additional savings by buying larger quantities of organic produce that keeps longer,

such as onions, potatoes, and dried foods. If you have the freezer space, consider purchasing meat in bulk from butchers, co-ops, or organic farms.

7. Plan meals and reduce waste. The average household wastes up to 40 percent of its food because of poor planning and inadequate storage. Build meal plans — and grocery lists — around the food that's already in your fridge. Store older veggies in one drawer and newer in a separate one, and rotate them so you don't lose sight of what's on hand.

8. Grow your own organics. Start small with herbs, which can provide big savings (see "An Herb Garden for Beginners" on the opposite page). Move up to easy-to-grow items like lettuce and other greens, zucchini, and cucumbers. Then try cultivating peppers, tomatoes, and carrots. Next thing you know, you'll have a full, vibrant, healthy garden — and a budget-friendly supply of organic produce.

— MICHAEL DREGNI



Stick With Your Natural Running Stride

That's the takeaway of a new study by 2016 U.S. Olympian Jared Ward and USA Track and Field consultant Iain Hunter, PhD, professors at Brigham Young University.

Ward and Hunter measured the energy use of 19 experienced and 14 novice runners using five different strides during a 20-minute run on a treadmill with a computer-based metronome. They found that all the runners were the most energy-efficient when they used their natural, preferred stride.

"Runners appear to naturally select a stride length that is optimal for minimizing oxygen uptake," they noted in the study, published in the *International Journal of Exercise Science*.

The study and accompanying press release offered some additional insights:

- "Many people are advocating for various 'optimal' running forms," says Ward, "but this study shows even novice runners shouldn't try to run any different than their body naturally does."

- "Coaches and athletes often try to manipulate running technique to improve performance. Since experienced runners self-regulate stride length to optimize economy, changing stride length will likely result in a greater metabolic cost."

- "When maximizing running speed over short distances is the main concern, runners may choose to sacrifice some economy to increase top speed."

— MD

“ Just let it happen; it doesn't need to be coached. **Your body is your best coach for stride length.**"

— IAIN HUNTER, PhD

An Herb Garden for Beginners

Growing an herb garden is an engaging, economical activity — and a great starting place for new gardeners. Plus, it can boost your mood and your immune system in the process. These four herbs are good beginner options.



Basil is a tender annual from the mint family that likes full sun. It's sensitive to the cold in early spring but does well on a sunny windowsill or in a container. Once transferred into your garden, it will grow quickly and prolifically. Keep soil moist but not soggy — water about weekly. Clip regularly for a rounded plant, and harvest before it flowers (or pinch off the bud) for best flavor. Basil is ideal for homemade pesto, caprese salads, and summer cocktails.



Chives are a low-maintenance perennial related to leeks, onions, and garlic. They need consistent watering and prefer full sun, but they can grow anywhere: indoors near a sunny window, in containers, or in your backyard. The flowers will scatter seeds; deadhead after they bloom so they don't take over your garden. Their subtle, summery flavor is a great addition to omelets, potato dishes, and salad dressings.



Parsley is a biennial that thrives in containers outside or on a warm windowsill. It prefers moist soil but can adapt to drier conditions. Harvest the outer stems the first year and leave the inner stalks to keep growing. The stems are more flavorful than the leaves, so be sure to use them, too. Flat-leaf parsley is good for soups, pasta dishes, and grain salads.



Thyme is a drought-tolerant evergreen perennial that needs full sun. It can grow in outdoor containers or your garden — where its fragrance will attract pollinators — or indoors near a sunny window. Thyme can be started from seeds, but is also easy to grow from cuttings. It adds an earthy note to stews, sauces, and roasted vegetables.



HERBS IN AN EGGSHELL

Eggshells make good seed starters, and when transplanted into soil, they break down naturally and nourish your herbs.

1. Slice off the top of eggshells with a sharp knife and pour the yolks and whites out, saving them for another use.
2. Rinse eggshells thoroughly, then air-dry in the carton.
3. Use a needle to puncture a small drainage hole in the base of each shell.
4. Mist the shells with water.
5. Scoop potting soil into shells with a small spoon.
6. Plant your seeds according to package instructions, and then gently mist with water.
7. Place carton on a sunny windowsill, and water according to package instructions while you wait for herbs to sprout.
8. Transplant them into a pot or your garden when your seedlings develop leaves. Gently crush the shells in the soil to speed the decomposition process.



The Mental-Health Benefits of Bird Watching

Living near a natural setting isn't just good for birds. Recent findings from the University of Exeter, the British Trust for Ornithology, and the University of Queensland indicate that people living in neighborhoods where they can see more trees, shrubs — and birds — have improved mental health.

The results, published in the journal *BioScience*, add to a growing body of evidence suggesting that natural environments can boost immunity as well as reduce levels of stress, depression, and anxiety.

To determine which environmental features are linked to positive mental-health outcomes, researchers explored the relationship between self-reported assessments for depression, anxiety, and stress and several metrics of neighborhood green spaces, including vegetation cover and the abundance of birds.

Scientists asked more than 260 people of various ages, incomes, and ethnicities — living in connected neighborhoods

featuring low- and high-density housing — to complete a short version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales.

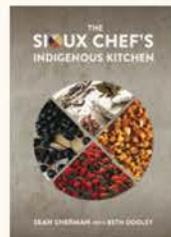
They also conducted extensive surveys to estimate the number of birds found in the neighborhoods.

After controlling for income, age, sex, and other factors, researchers found that respondents who could see more birds from their windows or gardens reported reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

How big a dose of nature is necessary to affect mental health? The results suggest that if everyone lived in neighborhoods with more than 20 percent vegetation coverage, the total number of people reporting symptoms of depression would drop by up to 11 percent, while cases of anxiety and stress would decrease by up to 17 percent.

While the causes of stress, depression, and anxiety are varied, the findings suggest that even brief interactions with nature might help unruffle your feathers.

— HEIDI WACHTER



WHAT TO READ NOW

THE SIOUX CHEF'S INDIGENOUS KITCHEN

An Oglala Lakota, Sean Sherman (a.k.a. The Sioux Chef) revitalizes native foods in the context of modern cuisine via catering and his Tatanka Truck food truck in Minneapolis-St. Paul. His first cookbook is stocked with healthy recipes inspired by his heritage.

www.sioux-chef.com

Drug Advertising: Pro or Con?

The United States and New Zealand are the sole countries worldwide that allow direct-to-consumer (DTC) pharmaceutical advertising.

In 2015 the American Medical Association (AMA) voted to recommend banning DTC advertising, due to "concerns among physicians about the negative impact of commercially driven promotions," said then-AMA board chair Patrice Harris, MD, MA.

In addition, healthcare professionals worry that marketing costs fuel escalating drug prices: "Direct-to-consumer advertising also inflates demand for new and more expensive drugs, even when these drugs may not be appropriate," Harris explained.

Big Pharma, on the other end, asserts that such ads provide valuable information to patients about treatment options and has consistently blocked all efforts to halt DTC advertising.

The following statistics offer some context on this marketing approach.

1

Rank of drug ads among the most prominent health information Americans receive, according to a 2011 paper published in the journal *Pharmacy and Therapeutics*.

\$6.4 billion

Amount healthcare and drug companies spent in the United States on DTC advertising in 2016, according to market-research firm Kantar Media. That's a 62 percent increase since 2012 — at a time when ad spending overall is down or flat. Most of the ads run during evening news programs, soap operas, and sitcoms aimed at the elderly.

2,058

Number of fine-print words describing side effects accompanying a typical one-page drug ad. For comparison, there are 1,337 words in the Declaration of Independence. The FDA mandates the warnings, but the agency has relaxed the amount of information required twice in the past 21 years. Ads now need to list only "major risks."

— MD