WHFoods: Budget-Conscious Ways to Purchase Organic Foods

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As many people scrutinize their finances, it's important to not overlook one of our most important investments, our health. Eating healthfully can play an integral role in long-term health-let alone the level of energy and vitality we feel in the present-so it's important to not give up healthy eating for fear that it costs too much to do so. When people think of healthy eating, they think that it costs much more than convenience and fast food. Yet, you can definitely eat well, with respect for your pleasure and health, while treating your wallet with respect.

In terms of following a health-supportive diet, one of the best things you can do is purchase organically grown/raised foods whenever possible. Yet, many people tend to shy away from organic foods due to perceived concerns that they cost much more than their conventionally grown/raised counterparts.

But it doesn't have to be that way, which is why we compiled some tips to share with you that can help you lower the cost of purchasing them. These tips include how to prioritize your organic food purchases as well as places that you can seek out organic foods at lower costs. We hope that these tips allow you to lower your food costs without sacrificing the enjoyment and healthfulness of your meals.

Shopping Strategies

Prioritize your organic produce purchases

If you can't buy 100% organic produce--and most of us can't because of price and/or availability-we wanted to offer you a strategy that can help you figure out which ones to prioritize. For this, we recommend the information that comes from the Environmental Working Group's Pesticides in Produce report. In it, they feature an updated list of the Dirty Dozen (12 fruits/vegetables with the most pesticide residues) and the Clean Fifteen (15 fruits/vegetables that feature the least amount of pesticide residues). It's best to prioritize buying the organically grown version of the items featured in the Dirty Dozen. You have less to worry about when it comes to the Clean Fifteen. (For more details see the Environmental Working Group's website at http://foodnews.org/.) Here are the two lists:

Dirty Dozen:

- 1. Celery
- 2. Peaches
- 3. Strawberries
- 4. Apples
- 5. Blueberries
- 6. Nectarines
- 7. Bell Peppers
- 8. Spinach
- 9. Kale
- 10. Cherries
- 11. Potatoes
- 12. Grapes (imported)

Clean Fifteen:

- 1. Onion
- 2. Avocado
- 3. Sweet Corn
- 4. Pineapple
- 5. Mango
- 6. Sweet Peas
- 7. Asparagus
- 8. Kiwifruit
- 9. Cabbage
- 10. Eggplant
- 11. Cantaloupe
- 12. Watermelon
- 13. Grapefruit
- 14. Sweet Potato
- 15. Honeydew Melon

Purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables that are in season

By purchasing locally grown produce in season you not only save money on the distribution costs of food, you also will enjoy foods that taste better and are more

nutritious. If you have a farmer's market in your area, visit it and meet the people who grow the food. Many may not offer fruits and vegetables that are labeled as organically grown (due to the expense of having their farm certified organic) but may grow their produce using the same principles.

Also, look into whether there are any Community Supported Agriculture groups (CSAs) in your area. CSAs are a way to support and buy produce directly from farmers; because you make a commitment to purchase for the growing season, it is usually less expensive. You can use the search feature on this website to find a CSA near you: http://www.localharvest.org/csa/

Join a natural foods co-op

Co-ops are natural food stores that are member owned. A small fee allows you to become a member, which not only gives you voting rights but usually allows you to save a lot of money in the long run. That's because most co-ops regularly offer members-only sales and specials and usually feature organic foods for less money that at conventional grocery stores.

Watch for specials

When you are thinking of what to prepare over the next few days (or week) organize some of your meals around organic foods that are on special at your local market. Next time you're in the market, ask a clerk if they have a print-out of what's currently on sale or what will be in the future. Or check the store's website before you visit. And don't forget, regular supermarkets aren't the only type of food store that run specials-many natural food stores regularly do so as well.

Do the preparation yourself

We live in a convenience society, a fact that is apparent when you visit a food market, or even just stroll down the produce aisle. Pineapples that have been cored, melons that have been quartered, carrots that have been cut into "baby" sizes, salad greens that are pre-washed...the list goes on and on. While these items may save you preparation time, they also cost more. If you're looking for another way to save money, purchase the whole organically grown fruits and/or vegetables and then prepare them at home.

Grow Your Own Food and Save Money

More and more people are turning to their own yard, or windowsill, as a source for the foods that they enjoy. Even our First Lady, Michelle Obama, has illustrated how you can readily grow vegetables in your own Victory Garden.

Gardening can be a great way to save money on food since the cost of the seeds, soil, and water usually pales in comparison to the cost of purchasing the foods at a market. If you grow some of your own food you are in control of what gets used in its cultivation-and what doesn't. It's easy to grow a garden without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides; resources abound on the Internet that provide easy tips on non-toxic pest control for gardens.

Even if you don't have the space-or time-to create a full-fledged garden, consider even growing a few types of vegetables. Leafy greens-such as arugula, mustard greens, and kale-are an easy place to start and you can even grow them in large pots on your deck if you don't have a yard. Urban apartment dwellers shouldn't discount the idea of growing their own food: small pots of fresh herbs-rosemary, mint, basil, or your other favorites-can not only embellish the taste and nutrition of your meals but the aroma of your home as well. And they will save you money from having to purchase fresh herbs at the market. This can definitely add up since most containers of fresh organic herbs are about \$3.00 and rarely do we use the whole package; oftentimes we just need a little for a recipe. Yet, if you grow your own herbs you can just clip off what you need when you need it, and save lots of money in the process.