

The Cost of Going Organic

The Motley Fool

By Elizabeth Brokamp



If the prices at my local Safeway are used as a measuring stick, you have to be downright rich to afford an all-organic diet. But it's not just the wealthiest among us who crave food free from pesticides or like the idea of fewer steps from field to table. What about average-income consumers who would like to buy organic but haven't quite figured out how to do it on a real-life budget? Sound like you?

Here are seven tips for going organic without breaking the bank:

- 1. Find your nearest CSA (community sponsored agriculture) program.** You buy a share of produce, meats, or even flowers from a CSA farm and in return are supplied with fresh products throughout the growing season. Shares typically run around \$350 to \$400 for produce for a 20-week growing season.
- 2. Learn how to cook.** If your definition of cooking is mixing the neon orange powdered cheese into macaroni noodles, then you're likely to be stuck with the overpriced and overpackaged grocery store organics. To take advantage of fresh organically grown produce and meats, take a few courses at a local cooking school or pay a culinary friend for lessons.
- 3. Go late to the farmer's market.** When quitting time comes, most farmers would rather sell their remaining stock for less than lug it all back home. You can get some great deals on produce, meats, and baked goods if you don't mind culling from the leftovers. If your shopping list is less flexible, come earlier but buy in bulk. Often, if you help them move more inventory (and freeze it at home), you can ask for a discount. (Keep in mind that farming is a tough business in which the profit margin is quite low already.)
- 4. Preserve.** We're apt these days to simply stick leftover foods in the freezer, but don't forget the lost arts of canning and drying. Consult the [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#) to get started.
- 5. Think seasonally.** To really save money when buying organic, you'll have to shift your mentality as a consumer. Unlike in the grocery store, where you have access to "fresh" oranges and blueberries in winter (shipped from some far-off tropical isle), you'll now need to harmonize your organic shopping list with the seasons, supplementing your diet with frozen, canned, or dried produce.
- 6. Cooperate.** Join a food co-op or a buying club to take advantage of the price benefits of buying in bulk without having to store all that food yourself. Co-ops are member-owned businesses in which you pay dues in order to get a range of items on your grocery list for less; buying clubs buy directly from the distributor to save big.

7. Turn your thumb green. You won't get much more control over the food you eat than when you grow it yourself. Live in the city? Try a window box garden or rent a garden plot in a community garden.

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