



TO TASTE

INGREDIENT GUIDE

Grocery shopping can be an overwhelming and confusing process, and without some guidance, it can be difficult to know which ingredients to purchase.

We created this ingredient guide so that as you prepare recipes, you can feel confident that your culinary creations maximize nutrition and palatability. This guide was designed to be flexible to work at any grocery store and for any budget.

Overall, choose natural ingredients as much as possible – ingredients that you immediately recognize when you read them. Not all additive “chemical” ingredients are bad per say, it’s just that there are so many that it can be hard to know which ones are okay and which ones to avoid; limiting these ingredients overall makes shopping and protecting your health a little easier. If you want some guidance on chemical additives, the Center for Science in the Public Interest has published a [comprehensive guide](#) to food additives. While we cannot guarantee their sources or research, we have not found another list of this kind.

We base our decisions on sustainability, environmentally-friendly practices, humane animal treatment, health, and palatability.

We hope that this guide helps you along your path to health!

- The Dietitians of To Taste

PRODUCE

Shop seasonally and locally for best price, flavor, and quality.

There is little evidence that organic produce is nutritionally superior to conventional. While synthetic pesticide levels might be of concern, there is also not substantial evidence of their harm. The effect on children might be of greater concern since concentration levels could be higher in their smaller bodies, so if you have children, consider purchasing organic. Otherwise, we leave the choice up to you and your budget. Organic farming may also be better for our environment – another reason to support organic practices.

Organic produce regulations require that plants be grown in soil that has had no prohibited substances applied for three years prior to harvest. Prohibited substances include most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

If conventional produce is all that you can afford, buy it! It's better to eat more fruits and vegetables than to worry about whether or not they're organic. [Safe Fruits and Veggies](#) is a great consumer resource that provides information about pesticide levels in both organic and conventional produce.

For frozen fruit, avoid added sugars.

EGGS

Choose either brown or white – color does not affect nutrition or palatability.

Choose Grade A (indicates yolk quality)

Good choice: large, cage-free, omega-3-enriched

Better choice: large, free-range

Best choice: large, free-range, *organic*

organic: laid by cage-free or free-range hens that have access to the outdoors and are raised on certified organic feed. The feed is grown without most synthetic pesticides, fungicides, herbicides or fertilizers, and 100% of the agricultural ingredients must be certified organic.

MEAT / POULTRY / FISH

Overall, limit consumption – especially red meat (beef, pork, goat, lamb). The best option is to source your meat from a local producer. Buy *organic* if you can afford it. The next best option is *natural*, although unfortunately, that term doesn't mean much.

BEEF

Best choice: organic, grass-fed

Next choice: natural, antibiotic- and hormone-free

BISON

Best choice: organic, grass-fed

CHICKEN

Best choice: organic, pasture-raised, no added sodium solution

Next choice: natural, antibiotic- and hormone-free, cage-free, vegetarian-fed

PORK

Best choice: organic, pasture-raised

Next choice: natural, antibiotic- and hormone-free

FRESH OR FROZEN FISH

Best choice: wild caught (*usually* higher in omega-3's, but it depends on farmed fish diets)

Next choice: farmed fish can be a good option depending on the farming practices. Reference the [Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch](#) website or app for best options.

CANNED TUNA

Best choice: canned in water or extra virgin olive oil

Aim to keep sodium between 140 mg – 200 mg/serving

Choose chunk light, albacore, yellow fin, or skip jack

CANNED SALMON

Best choice: Wild Alaskan, sustainably caught

Aim to keep sodium between 140 mg – 200 mg/serving

Choose pink or red (sockeye)

organic: animals are raised in living conditions accommodating their natural behaviors (like the ability to graze on pasture), are fed 100% organic feed and forage, and are not administered antibiotics or hormones.

natural: a product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and only minimally processed.

DAIRY

Choose low-fat or fat-free options if your saturated fat intake is high from other foods, like red meats. If you consume limited saturated fat, you can choose full-fat options.

Buy plain dairy products and flavor/sweeten them yourself.

Buy *organic* and grass-fed if you can afford it.

YOGURT

Plain, any variety – Australian, Bulgarian, French, Greek, Icelandic

Look for natural ingredients: milk, cream, cultures, etc.

If flavored, keep added sugars <8 grams (2 teaspoons)

Avoid artificial sweeteners

KEFIR

Plain, any variety – Australian, Bulgarian, French, Greek, Icelandic

Look for natural ingredients – milk, cream, cultures, etc.

CHEESE

Choose full-fat (low-fat/fat-free varieties don't melt or satisfy)

COTTAGE CHEESE

Look for natural ingredients – milk, cream, cultures, etc.

Limit gums and stabilizers

BUTTER

Unsalted

MILK

Best choice: grass-fed organic

Good choice: organic

MILK ALTERNATIVES

Look for limited ingredients (just nuts + water, soybeans + water, etc.)

Limit added sugar and salt

organic: milk must come from a cow that has not been treated with antibiotics, has not been given hormones (for either reproduction or growth), and has been fed at least 30% of its diet on pasture.

DRY GOODS

It's up to you to determine whether to purchase these ingredients *organic* or non-organic. We don't have a strong opinion one way or the other, so make the choice that feels best for your budget and lifestyle.

GRAINS

Look for whole grain varieties

Quick-cooking grains are a great option

Grains include quinoa, farro, millet, barley, bulgur, amaranth, brown rice, quinoa, oats, etc.

Brown Rice: short, medium, long, Jasmine, Basmati – variety will affect texture and flavor

Quinoa: any color (red, white, tricolor)

Oats: old-fashioned or rolled

PASTA

Choose whole grain more often

Okay to use traditional white pasta occasionally depending on ingredients and sauce

Lentil or bean pastas: look for bean flour as the only ingredient or limit to only natural ingredients

BREAD

Choose whole grain – look for “whole” as the first grain ingredient

Fresh baked recommended

Sourdough is the best refined grain option

BROTH

Look for natural ingredients

Low sodium or no salt added

NUT BUTTERS AND SEED BUTTERS

Look for the fewest possible ingredients – peanuts, almonds, cashews, etc.

Avoid palm oil

No added sugar (peanuts have ~2 grams of natural sugar/2 Tbsp. serving)

Sodium <140 milligrams/serving (some salt is okay!)

DRIED FRUIT

No added sugar (exceptions: cranberries and tart cherries for palatability)

No artificial sweeteners

FLOUR

All-purpose: unbleached

Whole wheat: regular or white whole wheat

DRY GOODS (continued)

POWDERED AND GRANULATED SUGAR

Made from sugar cane

HONEY

Pure 100% honey

Local if possible

Substitute agave if desired

MAPLE SYRUP

100% maple syrup

Grade and color do not affect nutrition or palatability

VANILLA

Pure vanilla extract

organic: foods cannot contain artificial preservatives, colors, or flavors and require that their ingredients are organic, with some minor exceptions. For example, processed organic foods may contain some approved non-agricultural ingredients such as enzymes in yogurt, pectin in fruit jams, or baking soda in baked goods.

CANNED GOODS

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CANNED FRUIT

Canned in water or 100% juice

Do not buy “low sugar” varieties (contain artificial sweeteners)

CANNED TOMATOES

No added salt or <140 milligrams sodium/serving

CANNED CORN

No added salt or <140 milligrams sodium/serving

CANNED BEANS

Low salt/low sodium varieties (140 milligrams sodium/serving)

CONDIMENTS / SPREADS / SAUCES

Often *natural* or *organic* varieties will be the best choice for the below products.

BARBECUE SAUCE

Look for natural ingredients – tomatoes, vinegar, molasses, spices

Avoid high fructose corn syrup

Limit sugar to <12 grams/serving

Limit sodium to <300 milligrams/serving

HUMMUS

Look for natural ingredients – garbanzo beans, tahini, oil, spices

MARINARA SAUCE

Look for natural ingredients – tomatoes, oil, spices, vegetables, salt, sugar

MAYONNAISE

Look for natural ingredients – eggs, oil, vinegar, spices

Choose mayonnaise made from healthier oils like canola, avocado, or olive oil

SALSA

Look for natural ingredients – vegetables, acids, spices

Limit sodium to <200 milligrams/serving

SOY SAUCE OR TAMARI

Low sodium/reduced sodium

Avoid caramel color

Choose tamari if gluten-free

natural: nothing artificial, synthetic, or anything that you wouldn't expect to be there has been added to a food, but there is NO OFFICIAL DEFINITION.

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OILS / VINEGARS

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EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Dark/tinted bottle (not clear)

Do not purchase "light tasting", "extra light", or "pure" versions

Use less expensive varieties for sautéing and roasting

Save expensive bottles for finishing and dressings

AVOCADO OIL

Use for high-heat cooking, baking, and neutral flavor

CANOLA OIL

Organic, expeller pressed

Use for high heat cooking, baking, and neutral flavor

APPLE CIDER VINEGAR

Unfiltered / "with the mother"

BALSAMIC VINEGAR

"Aged" for best flavor

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