

By Gaia Manco

As a result of a growing concern about environmental protection and food safety, Chinese consumers are turning their attention towards organic food. "Organic" means that the food is produced by farmers who do not use synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, chemical additives or GMO seeds. In addition to that, organic farmers try and reduce the impact of their farming on the soil and in general on the environment. Because of the way it is produced, organic food tends to be more expensive than non-organic produce, but supporters would argue that the higher price that comes with eating chemical-free food is worth it.

During my trip to the Beijing Farmer's Market, Fan Jie, a university student who volunteers there, explained that besides the price, another challenge that organic food producers encounter is that organic fruits and vegetables do not look as pretty as the ones we normally see in supermarkets. "Just look at our carrots!" Fan said, pointing her finger at some un-even looking oblong roots, and I couldn't help but agree with her.

But let's say you've decided to give it a try and have stocked up on organic, seasonal food: What's next? I asked organic food producers and supporters to share recipes that transform these ugly ducklings into beautiful and delicious dishes.

### Sweet Osmanthus Flavored Chinese Yam Juice

Although her dishes look as good as those from a professional, Eileen Gong is an amateur cook as well as an organic movement supporter. She invents recipes with what she buys at the Beijing Farmers' Market and shares the pictures of her culinary experiments on WeChat.

This drink can be enjoyed both hot and cold and is a healthy alternative to the bubble teas and sodas that you buy on the street. Osmanthus flowers can be bought in tea shops. In Chinese they are called *guihua*.

#### Ingredients

- ▶ 150g Chinese yam
- ▶ 30g rock candy
- ▶ 1 teaspoon dried sweet osmanthus flowers
- ▶ 1l water

Peel and cut the Chinese yam into pieces. Put yam, rock candy and water

in a pot. Bring the water to a boil, then cook on medium-low heat for about 10 minutes. Turn off the heat and pour the mixture in a blender. Blend, stir and add the dried osmanthus. Enjoy!

### Vegetable Baked Eggs

These baked eggs, another of Gong's creations, make for a great Sunday brunch dish. Remember to use seasonal vegetables for your recipes! You can add coriander, parsley, pepper or chili peppers to your taste.

#### Ingredients

- ▶ 100g spinach
- ▶ 1 medium-sized potato
- ▶ 1 medium-sized carrot
- ▶ 1/4 onion
- ▶ 8 small eggs
- ▶ 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ▶ 1 teaspoon salt

Preheat the oven at 180°C. Cut the

spinach, the potato, the onion and the carrot into thin slices. Beat the eggs. Heat the vegetable oil in a frying pan and when the oil is hot add the potato, the onion and the carrot. Cook them for about two minutes. Put the spinach in the frying pan and add salt to the vegetables. After two minutes turn the heat down and add the beaten eggs. Mix the eggs with the vegetables. Pour the mixture into a baking mould and bake for 20 minutes. Serve with toasted bread.

### Tibetan Breakfast

Since they refuse to use highly industrialized procedures, organic food producers often turn to traditional craftsmanship. This is the case for yak yogurt, a Tibetan specialty that yogurt maker Tibetan Yogurt produces in Beijing. Apart from using bacteria that confer to their yogurt its characteristic taste, the methods they use include more than just practical skills. "The Tibetan method includes some religious rituals as well," says Ke Kong, a volunteer with Tibetan Yogurt. "Before we prepare the yogurt, we burn incense and pray to Buddha." She recommends starting the day with a Tibetan breakfast.

#### Ingredients

- ▶ Qingke barley bread. Qingke is a special type of barley grown in the Tibet Autonomous Region, and in other Chinese regions with Tibetan culture.
- ▶ 200ml yak yogurt
- ▶ A handful of banana chips
- ▶ Dried raisins
- ▶ Almonds
- ▶ Walnuts



**Tibetan Breakfast**  
Photo: Courtesy of Tibetan Yogurt

When you buy yogurt, the preparations have already been done for you, therefore this recipe is very simple. What is left to do for you: Toast the barley bread. Pour your yogurt into a bowl and add your favorite mix of nuts and dried fruits!

### Mushroom Rice

Returning home from visiting a few farmers' markets in the capital, I decided to try my hand at cooking with organic ingredients and concocted the following dish, where I put together Chinese and European cuisine.

#### Ingredients

- ▶ 180 g rice
- ▶ 500 g organic mushrooms
- ▶ Two garlic cloves
- ▶ 1/2 onion
- ▶ Chili pepper (dried or fresh)
- ▶ 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ▶ 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- ▶ Coriander
- ▶ 1 teaspoon salt
- ▶ 1 l water

Pour one tablespoon of oil in a pot, heat it and toast the rice in the pot for 2-4 minutes. Stir quickly and often so that the rice does not stick to the bottom of the pot. Boil about one liter of salted water and pour it on the rice so that the rice is completely covered and keep cooking. Each time the water has been absorbed, add more until the rice is cooked but still hard inside. Put the rice aside and cook in a wok with the remaining oil, the garlic (cut into pieces), the onion (sliced) and the chili. Add the mushrooms and keep cooking for about seven minutes, then add the rice and the soy sauce and stir. Sauté the rice for three additional minutes. Turn the heat, add coriander on top and serve.

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A selection of organic recipes that are good for both you and the environment

Food for the soul

