

Did You Know . . .



Those pesky PLU code stickers that you have to peel off your fruit and vegetables do more than just convey prices to the cashier. If you know how to read they can tell you a thing or two.

Price Look-Up codes, commonly called PLU codes, PLU numbers, PLUs, produce codes or produce labels, are identification numbers affixed to produce and other products in grocery stores and supermarkets to make check-out and inventory control easier, faster, and more accurate.

The codes have been in use since 1990, and there are over 1300 universal PLU codes assigned as of 2008. Use of PLU codes eliminates the need for grocery store checkers to identify each variety of produce visually. The code is a four or five-digit number, currently in the 3000–4999 range, identifying the type of bulk produces, usually including the variety. Organic produce, grown to the standards of the National Organic Standards Board and the principles of organic farming, is denoted by a five-digit number whose first digit is 9 (e.g. 94011 for organic yellow bananas); an 8 prefix indicates genetically modified food.

Conventional produce (Grown with chemical pesticides and fertilizers) gets a four-digit number.



Organic produce gets a five-digit number that starts with 9.



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Genetically modified (GMO) items also get a five-digit code, but that code starts with 8.

Examples

A Conventionally grown Granny Smith apple would be: **4139**

An Organically grown Granny Smith apple would be: **94139**

A Genetically Modified Granny Smith apple would be: **84139**

If you want a full list of PLU codes, hit up the International Federation for Produce Standards, where you can look up the look-up the look-up codes and find out even more info. For instance, some PLUs are restricted to items grown in certain regions. (4138, for instance, denotes a Granny Smith grown in East/Central North America.) But if you want to decode *those* at the store, you'd have some memorizin' to do. And if you're really into it, here's the IFPS's [PLU Codes User Guide \(pdf\)](#)

Incidentally, the adhesive used to attach the stickers is considered food-grade, but the stickers themselves aren't edible.

