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GOOD EARTH

Find a healthier option with organic food

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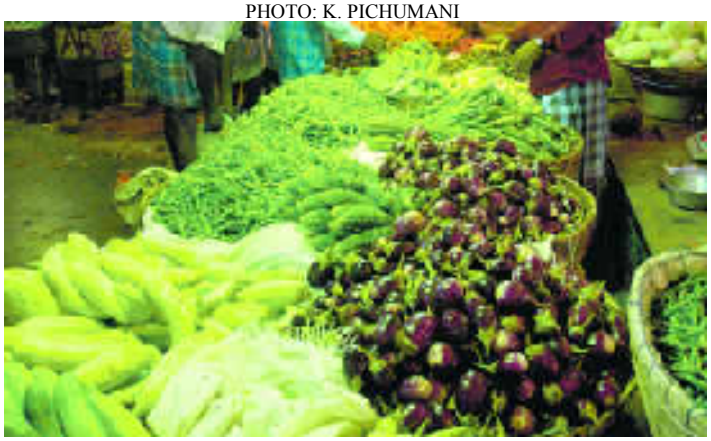
Chemicals gradually kill off the diversity of bacteria that help keep the soil aerated.

PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI



HEALTHY EATING: How safe are your vegetables?

Many of you may have heard about how pesticides and fertilizers have wrought havoc on soil as well as people's health.

People are finding that eating cereals, fruits and vegetables grown with the help of pesticides and fertilizers can lead to serious health problems that include birth defects, paralysis and cancer, in the long run. Using chemicals also reduces the fertility of the soil.

Chemicals gradually kill off the diversity of bacteria, earthworms and insects that help to keep the soil aerated, convert atmospheric nitrogen into soil nitrogen and decompose dead plants into nutrients.

For these reasons, more and more people are turning to organic farming in which fertilizers and pesticides are not used at all. Organic farmers grow crops of different types together, a technique that discourages crop pests from reaching damaging proportions through encouraging ladybirds, spiders and earwigs. These predatory creatures effectively control crop pests. Liquid extracts from plants such as *neem*, chrysanthemum and tobacco are also used instead of pesticides.

One of the important practices in organic farming is the use of biodegradable waste such as cow dung, crop residues and kitchen waste into compost that is used as a natural fertilizer.

This process depends only upon natural processes of bacterial decomposition to convert waste to riches.

You can do it too!

Collect all the biodegradable waste from your kitchen such as fruit peel, vegetable peel, egg shells, tea leaves, bones and spoilt food on a daily basis by keeping a container for this near your kitchen sink.

Every evening, throw all the waste into a small pit in the soil, which can be as small as two feet deep, one foot wide and two feet wide. After throwing your kitchen waste, deposit a little soil or dry leaves to deter flies. Once a week, stir the pit with a stick to allow some air in. In dry weather, keep the pit moist by spraying water every few days.

Once this pit gets filled, dig another one close to it. It is likely that by the time the second pit gets filled, the waste in the first pit would have converted to compost. The compost should be ready in 2-3 months' time depending upon the weather (heat and humidity).

Use this rich and dark compost on your plants and watch how the flowers bloom!

In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group