

## Organic + GMO?

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Have something to say about this essay in the latest issue of Organic Gardening? Join Editor Scott Meyer in the [OG forums](#) to discuss, November 13 9-11 p.m. ET.

The authors of a new book--she's a plant geneticist, he's an organic farmer--assert that biotechnology is a tool that can benefit organic farms and the environment.

By Pamela C. Ronald and Raoul W. Adamchak

*When the USDA announced in 1998 its proposed rules for the National Organic Program, Organic Gardening campaigned (along with other defenders of organic principles) to prohibit genetically engineered crops from being approved for use in certified organic foods. As a result of the public outcry, the USDA banned them from organic food. In the meantime, what are now called GMOs (genetically modified organisms) have become widely used in industrial agriculture, primarily as crops designed to survive dousing with the herbicide Roundup.*

*Now, in a provocative new book, Tomorrow's Table, Pamela C. Ronald and Raoul W. Adamchak argue that the tools of genetic engineering can be an important component of sustainable agriculture and they respond to many of the concerns about the technology. While we found the book insightful and well-documented, we trust the research that consistently shows organic farmers can produce high yields of nutritious, tasty food without genetically engineered (GE) varieties. We are publishing this excerpt because biotechnology is impacting our food system and we believe organic principles can be protected where it matters most only by understanding the nuances of scientific opinion.*

### Pest Control

**Geneticist:** I saved some 'Santa Rosa' plums last summer and froze them. We are lucky to have an orchard with plenty of "stone" fruits such as apricots and peaches, and I hope that they will always thrive here, but I am not sure. Stone fruits are susceptible to plum pox virus (PPV), which has been a devastating disease in Europe since the early 1900s. In 1992, PPV was reported for the first time in Chile, and in 1998 it was found in an Adams County, Pennsylvania, orchard. The only known method of control in case of an outbreak is to pull up and bulldoze the trees before the disease spreads. Because of this threat, the USDA developed a GE plum variety that is resistant. The GE trees look like their non-GE female parent--'Bluebyrd'--a commercial cultivar developed through traditional breeding. And their fruit tastes the same.

**Organic farmer:** The genetic approach of introducing disease-resistance genes into cultivated crops has been the mainstay of agriculture for the last 100 years....In the same way that the introduction of genes from wild species through breeding revolutionized farmers' management of pests, so can the introduction of genes through GE revolutionize control of diseases, insects, and nematodes for which there is presently no organic solution.

### Health Risks