

# Out-of-the-Ordinary Organic

by Kristen De Deyn Kirk photos by Kathy Keeney

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hen Carl Helvie recently left a voice mail message, he didn't sound so well — a little hoarse and a lot tired.

"They thought I had pneumonia," he said on the message.

"They" were wrong, though: Helvie, who used to be an Old Dominion University nursing professor and is the author of *Healthy Holistic Aging: A Blueprint for Success*, is rarely ill, and all he had was an allergy attack (albeit a severe one) brought on by something he encountered out of state.

At age 75, Helvie's among a small minority — 11 percent, he says — of Americans older than 65 who do not have a chronic illness and do not take regularly prescribed medications. He notes that the average for people 75 years old is three chronic illnesses and five prescribed medications.

Among his secrets: Eating organic.

"The lack of attention to food safety and the increasing number of food recalls and contaminations in the U.S. have made it necessary to be selective in what one eats," he wrote in an e-mail.

Helvie is worried, very worried, about the state of America's food. He says that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports 76 million people in the United States having a food-borne illness each year; 325,000 of the people are hospitalized and 5,000 die.

"The system of food safety at the federal level is so fragmented among different agencies that the Government Accountability Office reported the food safety oversight program a "high risk" area," he wrote.

While Helvie now shares this information with people to help them, the scary news is not what motivated him to eat organic and healthy.

He was born during the Depression in the early '30s and didn't have the resources or technology to eat otherwise. His family grew their own fruit and vegetables without pesticides or artificial fertilizers, and they raised, killed and canned antibiotic- and growth-hormone-free cow and pigs for the winter. They also enjoyed "skim" milk (his mother took off the cream for her coffee), and organic eggs. He reports food being irradiation- and additive-free.

"There was also no farm-grown salmon, genetically engineered foods, and no mercury in the fish obtained from the local river," Helvie shared. "It was a very different time from now, and I feel fortunate to have grown up during an era when the environment was free from most modern pollution."

No one can say for sure, but eating organic might have helped Helvie survive lung cancer 31 years ago. Doctors gave him six months to live.

Back then, eating organic was exotic and difficult. Now, in the new millennium, it's not exactly mainstream, but at least most people know how to get to the healthy stream of food — although they may be confused once they're near it.

As more food is labeled "organic," or something that looks like "organic" from across the grocery store aisle, consumers have to move in for a careful check.

Organic, according to the web site [www.organic.org](http://www.organic.org), is "organic produce and other ingredients... grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms, or ionizing radiation. Animals that produce meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products do not take



Right: Leaping Lizard's owner Bill Prince gives his own recipe for fried green tomatoes—which are on a bed of gazpacho, garnished with a sauté of browned butter, sweet corn and fresh basil

antibiotics or growth hormones."

When a food package says "100% organic," it's made with 100 percent organic ingredients, if it says "organic," it's made with at least 95 percent organic ingredients. "Made with organic ingredients" means the product has at least 70 percent organic ingredients and no genetically modified organisms.

An USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) Seal means that government inspectors have annually inspected the operation where the food was made.

People who like to cook at home can find organic — in its various degrees — at just about all local supermarkets (even the not-so-upscale Wal-Mart!) — but not necessarily a huge selection of any one product. For those serious about eating organic, they'll need to turn to local organic farmers practicing community supported agriculture (CSA), such as New Earth Farm in Virginia Beach, and one-time CSA Organic Food Depot, which has grown to four stores in Virginia Beach, Norfolk and Portsmouth with a mixture of

**We hear so much about organic food these days, but for some the healthy way of eating has been a life-long habit that's paid off.**



organic, vegetarian and vegan foods.

Local chefs – at least the best of the bunch — have supported Seven Cities farmers for decades, and more are seeking out organic foods. Bill Prince at Leaping Lizard on Shore Drive in Virginia Beach doesn't find as much as he'd like when he's looking for fruits and vegetables, but he does like the organic mushrooms supplied by Dave and Dee's Mushrooms, a farm in Sedley, outside of Suffolk, and some organic tomatoes he's been able to find.

Maybe Helvie, while he's recovering from his allergy attack and taking it easy, can head to Leaping Lizard to try Prince's fried green tomatoes on top of gazpacho with corn. Or, if he's feeling better already (and chances are, he probably is), he can try the recipe that Prince generously shared with Accents' readers:



## Fried Green Tomatoes

### Gazpacho

4 cups 1% fat tomato juice  
 1/3 cup lemon juice  
 1/3 cup red wine vinegar  
 2 T oil  
 1 T Old Bay  
 1 tsp onion  
 1 tsp garlic  
 Blend together.

In a blender, blend 1 cup onion, 1 yellow pepper, 1 onion, 1 seeded and seeded cucumber, 2 ripe tomatoes, 2 clover garlic. Combine all ingredients and chill for two hours.

### Corn

1 ear fresh corn kernels cut from the cob.  
 Heat some oil to very hot. Add 1/2 butter (2 sticks or less). Add corn, salt and pepper and 1 chopped fresh chili. Cook for 3 minutes. Transfer to another small bowl and set aside.

### Tomatoes

Combine 1 cup cornmeal, 1/2 cup flour, 1 T Old Bay, salt/pepper.  
 Whisk together two eggs, 2 T water.  
 Slice 4 green tomatoes 1/2 inch thick.

Individualy dip each tomato slice into water and dredge in the cornmeal, set aside. (Use larger than 1/2 minutes oil at frying.)

Heat 1/4 cup canola oil and fry tomatoes on one side until lightly browned. Flip and place in another cooking vessel and finish cooking for a 400-degree oven for 1-2 minutes.

To plate: Ladle gazpacho into plate, place 4 slices of tomato on gazpacho and add with a side spoon of the corn sauce.

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