

What Does Certified Organic Mean, and Why Is It Important?

Holly McWhorter

“Organic,” “plant-derived,” “green,” and “clean”—these terms are thrown around a lot these days in clean beauty, making it hard to distinguish what’s genuinely green from what’s not. But marketing words aside, ingredients don’t lie.

Using ingredients that are sustainably sourced and organically grown is paramount to PLANT Apothecary’s ways. As you may have noticed, all of our products that can be are certified USDA Organic. It’s a major undertaking to earn this certification for any product, but it’s well worth the effort. What it essentially means is that a required percentage of the ingredients are certified organic, meaning they can’t have been grown using any toxic pesticides, radiation, GMOs, or sewage sludge.

We make the effort to get our products certified organic because organic certification is more than just a fancy label to us. It’s a way of letting you know that we truly care about the ingredients we use to formulate our products, and, moreover, what you put on your skin. It also indicates our commitment supporting environmentally friendly farming and growth practices. After all, wouldn’t it be great if farming with toxic chemicals went out of style, and we could trust that farming was safe for both us and the environment? Buying organic is a great way to move us toward that goal.

With that in mind, all PLANT products are certified USDA Organic if it’s possible for products in their category to be so. And all of our products are 100% free of sulfates, petroleum derivatives (like mineral oil), parabens, dimethicone and other silicones, and other synthetic ingredients.

A few of our products, however, can’t be certified USDA Organic for technical reasons. For example, our MATCHA Antioxidant Face Mask is made of just three clean ingredients: organic, fair-trade matcha tea, organic essential oil of chamomile, and white clay. It’s the clay that keeps the mask from being certified, because a certified organic product must be made of at least 70% organic ingredients, and organic certification is specifically a reference to how an ingredient is grown. But clay is mined from the earth, not grown—so it can’t be certified organic, no matter how clean and natural it is.

Likewise, our body washes are made with organic ingredients, but are not labelled USDA Organic because of the chemistry of soapmaking. To make soap, a naturally derived alkaline compound like potassium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide is mixed with oils to make them into soap—but that alkaline compound is no longer present in the final mix, once the chemical reaction has occurred. Nevertheless,

the USDA includes it anyway when calculating whether the organic ingredients make up at least 95% of the formula. So even though the final product is actually more than 95% organic, it can't be certified as such. But you can tell a natural soap is fully organic if the oils it's made from (you'll see them among the first 5 ingredients) are certified organic, as ours are.

As Sir Francis Bacon once said, knowledge is power. Now that you're armed with that knowledge, you can use it to choose the best clean skincare you can find (ours, of course!).