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Andrews University

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Farm fresh

The health benefits of buying local produce

We all know that fresh fruits and vegetables are a crucial part of a healthy diet. They pack a wallop of nutrients, vitamins, antioxidants and fiber, and when compared to their canned or frozen counterparts, the taste simply can't be beat. And now, with the local growing season in full swing, getting our daily dose is easier than ever. Farmers markets, produce stands and even roadside vendors are your unrivaled source for the best and most nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables.

"When you buy locally grown, you're getting the produce at its peak form," says Darlene Price, senior nutrition resource educator at Orange County Cornell Cooperative Extension. "It's ready to eat right now. When you buy your fresh produce in a supermarket, you're never really sure how long it's been sitting."

Much of the produce sold at large supermarket chains is grown hundreds of miles away, in places such as California, Florida and Mexico. That means days — perhaps even more than a week — have passed since it was picked, packaged and trucked to the store, where it can sit on the shelves even longer. Often, too, produce is picked before it's ready, preventing it from ever reaching its nutritional potential.

How long a bunch of romaine lettuce has been sitting around, it turns out, has a direct impact on just how good that romaine really is for you. That's because food starts to change as soon as it's plucked from the earth and tender vitamins such as C, E, A and thiamine begin to deteriorate.

"Over time, vitamin stability decreases," says Erika Ichinose, program coordinator for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program at Cornell University Cooperative Extension in New York City.

Temperature changes, exposure to air and artificial light all wreak havoc, she says, robbing fruits and vegetables of nutrients.

A seemingly endless variety is yet another advantage our local farmers have over their giant commercial counterparts, who are restricted to crops that can survive long storage and the arduous transportation process. Local farmers plant what's delicious, healthful and in local demand.

"The large farmers have to plant things that will survive a lot of abuse," says Louis Schultz, coordinator of the Florida market. "We've gotten very removed from our food. The average supermarket potato travels 1,500 miles. Local farmers don't have to worry about factoring all that in. They can plant anything."

Take, for example, the purple peppers proudly offered by Dagele Brothers Produce, a third-generation farm in Florida. Leah Fitzgerald of Blooming Grove filled her reusable green fabric grocery bags with them, and she'll use them in fresh salads or slice them for snacking.

"I'm a little compulsive when it comes to shopping here," says Fitzgerald. Her bounty from Dagele's included Swiss chard and cucumbers, and she was heading toward another stand brimming with local peaches and cider. Each Tuesday she spends her lunch hour at the Florida market, and on Fridays she heads to the one in the Village of Goshen for more.

"Last year I really discovered farm markets, and it brings me pleasure to shop at them," Fitzgerald says. The selection, variety and quality are always terrific, she says, and she's often inspired to try the new foods she seems to discover each time she shops. "It's all healthier, fresher, really wonderful."

The diversity available at the local markets means that a larger range of nutrients and disease-fighting phytochemicals — which give fruits and vegetables their bright, deep color — is there for the taking. Nutritionists advise us to “eat the rainbow,” and the color spectrum at a local farmers market is simply unrivaled.

“Each vegetable, each variety of plant food, has a different variety of benefits,” Ichinose says. “Phytochemicals give food their color. At a farm market you might find purple carrots. You just don’t find something like that at your average grocery store.”

Massive volume and fierce competition mean supermarkets often can sell fruits and vegetable at lower prices, which local growers simply may not be able to match. But even if some prices are slightly higher (and certainly that’s not always the case — bargains abound, too), shopping the local markets can be cost-saving. Growers note that because you’re buying fresh, your food will last longer once you get it home, so that fresh basket of strawberries won’t end up growing fuzzy and tossed in the trash.

Recipes

Summer Vegetable Stew

Ingredients

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil plus some to drizzle
1 bay leaf, fresh or dried
3 cloves garlic, 2 chopped, 1 whole cracked from skin
2 onions, sliced
2 large potatoes, peeled and chopped
1 eggplant, chopped
1 zucchini, chopped
1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
Salt and pepper
1 (28-ounce) can fire roasted diced tomatoes
1 cup vegetable stock
1/2 cup torn or chopped basil (10 to 12 leaves)
4 (1-inch thick) slices whole-grain crusty bread
1/2 cup grated pecorino

“Fresh farm market produce tends to store better at home because it still has plenty of life left in it,” says Price, of the Orange County Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Price adds that she never minds spending a bit more of her food budget at a local market because the health benefits are so superior that, in the long run, she believes it’s one of the most economical things she can do.

“So maybe you spend a little bit more, but it’s so much better for you,” Price says. “I eat better and stay healthier because of (local farm markets), and that means I won’t be spending my money on cold medicines or prescriptions. I think of it as an extra health insurance policy.”

- Lisa Ramirez
Times Herald-Record

*Get Your Fresh Produce from the Andrews Farm!
The Department of Agriculture’s produce stand has taken up residence in the Neighbor to Neighbor parking lot. The stand will be open Monday to Thursday from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. and 4-5:30 p.m., and on Fridays from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.)*

Directions

Preheat broiler.

Heat a medium soup pot over medium heat. Add extra-virgin olive oil, bay leaf, chopped garlic and onions and let them sweat out while you prepare the rest of the veggies. Work next to the stove and drop as you chop, in order of longest cooking time: potatoes, eggplant, zucchini, and bell pepper. Season with salt and pepper, cover and cook 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Uncover and add tomatoes and stock and cook 5 minutes more, to heat through. Turn heat off and stir in basil.

Char bread under broiler and rub with cracked garlic then drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil, top with cheese and pepper and return to the broiler for 30 seconds to brown cheese. Serve cheese whole-grain toast with bowls of vegetable stew.

Health Tips

Who's in your Fave 5?

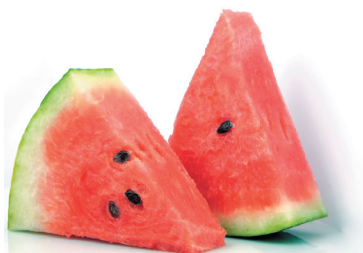
A showcase of the five best local fruits and vegetables

Michigan may have not had the best weather this summer, but we still have the best produce. Now is the time to enjoy our local treasure of abundant fruits and vegetables of the highest quality. If you're new to this community, all you have to do is drive around and you'll find it. Here are some "need-to-know's" about why you should take advantage of this year's crop.

Watermelon

Watermelons originated in the deserts and semi-tropical regions of Africa. Egyptians have been cultivating the melons for more than 4,000 years.

Watermelon contains vitamins A, C, B6, and potassium. It is fat-free, and high in energy and contains lycopene which may reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease.



Sweet Corn

Corn, also known as maize, is a member of the grass family and grew wild in what is modern-day Mexico. Native Americans grew corn as a crop and fertilized the seed by planting it with fish. One acre of land can produce 14,000 pounds of Sweet Corn.

Compounds found in corn have been shown to help prevent cardiovascular disease. Research has found that diets rich in foods like corn can help lower the risk of lung cancer.



Squash

Squash was one of the "Three Sisters" planted by Native Americans, which is one of the three main indigenous plants used for agriculture: maize (corn), beans, and squash. Though considered a vegetable in cooking, botanically speaking, squash is a fruit.

Half a cup of cooked acorn squash contains more than 400mg of potassium. Potassium-rich foods have been confirmed by the FDA to stop strokes. It also contains Potassium which fights high blood pressure.



Apple

Ancient Greeks discovered grafting techniques 2,500 years ago. Apples traveled to New England with the Pilgrims, while Johnny "Appleseed" Chapman introduced the trees to the rest of the country.

Apples are a member of the rose family. Americans eat 19.6 pounds or about 65 fresh apples every year. Apples are an excellent source of fiber.



Grapes

Grapes were first cultivated as early as 6000 B.C. in the region between the Black and Caspian Seas near northern Iran. Later, the growing of grapes spread to Europe, North Africa, and eventually to the United States.

Ripe grape juice is an important home remedy for curing a migraine. It should be taken early in the morning, without mixing additional water. Grapes are also very effective in overcoming constipation. They are considered as a laxative food, as they contain organic acid, sugar and cellulose. They also relieve chronic constipation by toning up the intestine and stomach.



Links



ABC of Fitness is your complete fitness, exercise and health portal. The website will help you by providing all the fitness and exercise information you need. Their daily newsdesk will keep you up to date with what is happening in the world of fitness and health. And their fitness shop can also help you select and buy the right fitness equipment, often with great discounts.

Special Features

- Basics & Backgrounds
- Getting Started
- Fitness Exercises
- Fitness Safety
- Fitness Nutrition & Diet
- Fitness Variations
- Equipment & Gear

Upcoming Events

Journeying with Your Parents into their Old Age
Thursdays, September 3, 10, & 17
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Lakeland Regional Medical Center
Call (800) 323-0390

Join us for an educational program designed to help adult children and their aging parents deal with sensitive life topics. Presented by the Area Agency on Aging Region IV. Two hour classes are held once a week, for three weeks.

Prediabetes Class
Monday, September 21
5:30 pm to 8:00pm
Lakeland Center for Outpatients Services
(269) 927 - 5465

This class group class is designed for anyone who has higher-than-normal blood sugar levels and is at risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Participant will learn important lifestyle changes that can help them avoid or delay the onset of diabetes.

Blood Drives
Friday, September 11
10:00 am to 6:00 pm
Lakeland Regional Medical Center
Tuesday, September 15
11 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.
Lakeland Specialty Hospital

Every two seconds in the United States, someone needs blood. But only five percent of eligible people donate blood. Healthy donors are the only source of blood - there is no substitute. Help your community by the giving blood.

Heart Care :Heart Lessons
Thursday, September 3 & 6
7:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Thursday, September 10
6:00pm
(269) 556-2808

This free one-hour class was created to help you understand heart disease, identify your risk factors, and learn how to decrease your chances of heart attack or stroke.