

How to Be a Savvy Market Shopper

PLAN AHEAD

- Know what day and hours your local market is in operation and mark it on your calendar so you don't forget. Determine the exact location and where the most convenient parking is (this comes in handy when you're lugging around a watermelon or 20 ears of corn).
- Dress for the weather – is it 90 degrees outside or is there a possibility of rain? Most markets are open no matter what the weather conditions. And be sure to wear comfortable shoes – those three inch heels aren't sexy as you stumble around on the grass.
- Bring plenty of small bills and change. Your vendor will appreciate it and your transaction will be quicker.
- Bring your own canvas or nylon bag(s), a basket or backpack. You might consider investing in a wheeled cart or wagon if you buy in large quantities. Just be careful "driving" it since many people will be milling around.
- Put a cooler in your trunk to put your fresh food items in, especially in extremely hot weather. They'll stay much fresher and in some cases you might need it for fresh eggs or fresh frozen meats or cheeses.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- A farmers' market is not a grocery store, so don't expect all fruits and vegetables for sale at any time of year. Educate yourself about what grows when in your immediate area and how crops are affected by weather conditions. Your growers will be happy to share with you what they'll be bringing to market in the coming weeks.
- Learn the lingo – for example: what does it really mean if something is grown or raised without hormones; what does free-range mean; what's the difference between certified organic and organic?
- Have a general idea of what type of meals you'll be fixing, but be flexible enough that you can take advantage of good prices or quantities.

AT THE MARKET

- Get there early and remember that most markets begin at a scheduled time. This allows all vendors to complete their set up without interruption and begin selling at the same time.
- Take your time and browse – get an overview of what's available, what works with your menu plan and who has the best price.
- Ask questions – vendors love to share their knowledge and can give you information about how your food is grown, when certain items are in season, special cooking tips and their favorite recipes. Don't be surprised if you develop a seasonal friendship with the vendors at the market you attend.
- Be spontaneous – trying new things is part of the fun of going to a farmers market. Learn how to select different items and prepare them.
- Be careful not to overbuy if you are new to shopping for fresh local produce. Give yourself a week or two of lighter shopping to see how much fresh food you eat without having any of

- it spoil. Due to the lack of pesticides and preservatives, some produce may expire quicker; however, other produce may last longer because the food is picked fresh for the market.
- If you're planning on canning or freezing, buy in bulk. Make arrangements in advance with your grower, whenever possible. The more you buy, the more likely you are to get a deal.
 - Strike up a conversation with others. Many new friendships are developed at local markets as customers share their love of food and exchange recipes.

FYI

- Select fruits and vegetables with smooth, firm skins and few lacerations – this means more of the vitamin-rich skins can go in your cooking.
- Rich color generally means higher vitamin content. Since each color fruit and vegetable correlates to different essential vitamin groups, you'll be more likely to get well-rounded nutrition if you eat a variety of colored produce.
- Decide what size produce you want – larger produce can be hollowed out for stuffing (e.g. green peppers), while some smaller produce may provide more flavor.
- Think beyond salads when you select your leafy greens. Items like spinach, butter lettuce, chard, kale and collards can give added flavor to casseroles and pasta dishes. If steaming, select dark leaves with firm juicy stems. Remember: dark green is a sign of high iron.
- Use the *less is more* theory. Keep your food preparations simple to let the natural superior flavor come through when you cook.

Most importantly . . . enjoy the experience! Once you discover what fresh, wholesome food tastes like, you'll understand why more people are shopping at their local farmers' market.