

## Farmers Market Shopping Tips

We all know we should be eating local, but sometimes doing that is harder than it sounds. Shopping at a farmers market is one of the easiest ways to eat local. When you stop to chat with the vendors at a farmers market you get to see where your food comes from. Not only that, but you get to speak with the producer.

With all the yummy products available at a farmers market, more than one shopper has gone home with food which eventually will go uneaten. Others go home after a morning's tour around the stalls, carrying nothing but a bunch of carrots and a dazed expression.

A bit of preplanning not only keeps weekly farmers market shopping fun, but it can also make cooking a snap all week long. Here are some tips for making it easier:

**Bring small bills or loose change.** Most farmers markets don't have an ATM available.

**Bring your own bags.** What about one or two of those reusable cloth bags? They're stronger than regular plastic bags, they hold more items, and are easier to carry.

**Store a small cooler in your car.** A lot of prepared items like meat pies, eggs, and fish will stay fresher in there.

**Get to the market by 9am.** Especially when it's the season for local strawberries or blueberries, because they sell quickly!

**Know what grows when.** Eating local is best when you follow the growing season. Check out our "*What's in Season When*" guide.

**Shop on an empty stomach.** There are always free samples to try. We also welcome everyone to our market cafe. It's a great place to sit and enjoy a delicious snack or lunch of prepared food from vendors.

**Shop for deals.** Make sure you walk the entire market before you make any purchases. Check out prices so you get the best deal—otherwise you might spend all your cash in one corner and regret missing out on something later on.

**Be smart.** Buy heavy items at the end of your market visit. Don't get weighed down by that 10lb bag of potatoes.

**Get advice from the source.** If you find a vegetable that's new to you and you want to give it a try, ask the farmer how best to prepare it. Don't be shy to ask questions. Farmers are passionate about food. For the best tips, ask how *they* like to eat it. You might even get a secret family recipe from a farmer!

**Buy in bulk.** For the best deals, buy lots of whatever is at its harvesting peak. Try new recipes with favorite vegetables, and if you can't use it all up with those, learn to preserve food. Freezing, canning, and drying are some of the ways you can save seasonal tastes you find at the farmers market so you can enjoy them later in the year.

**Try not to haggle.** Remember, you are supporting the local economy. In most cases, you are directly paying the farmer who harvested that yummy food for you.

**Be spontaneous.** Yes, you'll fare better if you plan your trip to the farmers market; however, leave a bit of room for that arugula you hadn't thought would be at market so early, or the zucchini blossoms you've never tried before. Trying new things is part of the fun of going to a farmers market. And being spontaneous doesn't apply just to the fresh produce. As you walk the room you might find that one-of-a-kind piece of art made by a local artisan. You know what I mean—that treasure you simply must take home!

**Be courteous.** Pay extra attention to fellow shoppers and the stalls as you make your way through a busy market. People can be easily distracted by everything that's going on around them.

**Relax and have fun.** Don't go to a farmers market with time constraints. Enjoy your Sunday morning with us!

**Keep it simple.** Farmers markets sell ultra-fresh produce, so when you get it home to cook it, let its natural flavour show by keeping your preparations simple. This will make cooking easier for you, which means you'll be more likely to check out even more local foods from the farmers market next week.

