

Locally Grown Food



Going Organic

More than 40 organizations and state agencies certify organic food, the U.S. Department of Agriculture says, and each group may have its own rules for growing and labeling organic food.

In the late 1980s, Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act to help define and promote organic food.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

An organic label, especially the official USDA Organic label, indicates the food or other agricultural product was produced using approved methods. The methods used in organic farming integrate cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster the cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity. Organic farms may not use synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation or genetic engineering.

WHO OVERSEES IT?

The USDA, through the National Organic Program, oversees organic farming on a national scale. It also accredits other groups to certify farms as organic on its behalf. The agency says there are 30,000 on-site inspections per year by certifying agents to monitor compliance with USDA



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standards. Agents may test crops to verify prohibited pesticides aren't used and conduct investigations.

OTHER LABELS

Some farm products may use other labels such as cage-free, free range or natural. Here's what those labels mean, according to the USDA:

- **Free-range.** This means that the animals that produced

the commodity were provided shelter in a building, room or other area with unlimited access to food, fresh water and access to the outdoors during the production cycle. The outdoor area may be fenced or covered with netting. The USDA polices the use of this label.

- **Cage-free.** This means animals that produced the commodity were able to freely

roam in a building, room or enclosed area with unlimited access to food and fresh water during the production cycle.

- **Natural.** The USDA says natural products must be minimally processed and contain no artificial ingredients. But this label does not include any standards regarding farm practices and applies only to processing of meat and egg products. There are no

standards for products if they do not contain meat or eggs.

- **Grass-fed.** Animal products labeled grass-fed indicate the animal that produced the item received a majority of their nutrients from grass throughout their life. It does not limit the use of antibiotics, hormones or pesticides.

- **Humane.** Humane labeling programs are not regulated by the USDA.

How to Find a Farmers Market



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Farmers markets can provide shoppers a way to get their produce and other farm-raised goods directly from the source.

These events are great ways to meet the producers in your area and learn about what they have available.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

When you drop by the market, just like with the grocery store, it's a good idea to know at least roughly what you're looking to buy. Bring a list of ingredients for upcoming meals, as

well as a handful of plastic bags for produce and some reusable shopping bags. If you're going to be out and about for a while, you may choose to bring a cooler and ice packs to keep your goods fresh.

TALK TO THE FARMERS

Get friendly with the vendors, too, but don't monopolize their time. Ask about their favorite produce, how to prepare what they're selling, what they have available in different seasons and more. Remember that whatever merchandise you're looking at took hours of work, probably by the person working the booth at the market. Have respect for the goods and don't make negative comments.

SHOPPING FOR QUANTITY

If you're looking to buy a large quantity of produce for pickling or putting up, for example, arrange with the farmer ahead of time to make the purchase so you don't wipe them out for other shoppers. If negotiations are acceptable at your local market, take care of that ahead of time, too.

MAKE A DAY OF IT

Some farmers markets offer prepared foods, live entertainment and attractions other than just farm-fresh produce. Plan to spend the day shopping and enjoying the market and bring everything you'll need to relax and shop. Consider packing up chairs, coolers, snacks, sunscreen

and more. Some markets may allow pets while others don't allow them around the food. It's always a good idea to check before bringing the pups along.

FINDING A MARKET

Several organizations, including the USDA, maintain lists of active farmers markets. Look for the National Farmers Market Directory at usdalocalfoodportal.com, where you can search for agritourism, community supported agriculture, farmers markets, food hubs and on-farm markets. The American Farmland Trust maintains a directory at markets.farmland.org, and Local Harvest has one at localharvest.org.

Choosing Fresh Fruits and Veggies

One of the easiest ways to shop fresh fruits and vegetables and get the best taste, on budget, is to shop what’s in season.

With so much produce available year-round, however, it’s hard to know what’s a seasonal buy. We’re here to help.

SPRING

Look for produce such as apricots, asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, kale, lettuce, onions, peas, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, strawberries and turnips.

Baked Carrot Fries
Recipe is from Oregon State University.

- Ingredients**
- 1 1/2 pounds carrots, trimmed and peeled
 - 1 teaspoon cumin
 - 1/2 teaspoon paprika
 - 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
 - 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
 - 1/4 teaspoon salt
 - 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
 - 2 tablespoons vegetable oil

- Directions**
1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Lightly grease a large baking sheet.
 2. Cut carrots to 1/2 inch by 3-4-inch pieces and place in a large bowl. Mix the spices together and pour over carrots. Stir to cover. Add oil and stir well.
 3. Pour carrot pieces onto the baking sheet. Move them around so



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- they do not touch.
4. Bake for 7-10 minutes, then stir the carrots to turn them. Bake 7-10 minutes longer, or until browned on the edges and tender in the center.

SUMMER

Warmer days bring more fruits to the menu. Some summer produce options include: avocados, bell peppers, blackberries, blueberries, cantaloupe, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, honeydew melon, lima beans, okra, peaches, plums, summer squash, tomatillos, tomatoes, watermelon and zucchini.

Watermelon and Whipped Feta with Honey and Pistachio
Recipe is from the National

Watermelon Promotion Board.

- Ingredients**
- 1 watermelon, cut into triangle pieces
 - 10.5 ounces feta cheese
 - 1/2 cup olive oil
 - Drizzle of honey, to taste
 - 1 cup chopped pistachios
 - Thyme for garnish

- Directions**
1. In a food processor, blend feta and olive oil until creamy. If the cheese is too thick, add more olive oil, a tablespoon at a time, until desired consistency is reached. You can also whip the feta with heavy whipping cream until stiff peaks form.
 2. Spread the whipped feta onto the watermelon triangles, then drizzle with honey, chopped

pistachios and fresh herbs. Serve immediately.

FALL

Cool-weather produce comes back in fall. Look for apples, beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cranberries, lettuce, pears, pomegranates, potatoes, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, turnips and winter squash.

Rosemary Castle Potatoes
Recipe is from CalFresh.

- Ingredients**
- 2 pounds new potatoes
 - 1/4 cup olive oil
 - 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, chopped
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt

- Directions**
1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Cut potatoes in half and place in a plastic resealable bag or a large bowl. Pour the olive oil over potatoes and shake or stir to coat.
 2. Transfer potatoes to a baking sheet in a single layer.
 3. Crush the rosemary with the back of a spoon to release oil. Sprinkle salt and rosemary over the potatoes and stir to mix. Bake for 35-45 minutes, or until potatoes are brown on the outside and tender on the inside.

WINTER

Winter brings citrus among other fruits and cold-friendly vegetables. Look for cabbage, celery, grapefruit, kale, leeks, lemons, limes, oranges, parsnips, rutabagas, Swiss chard and winter squash.

Citrus Salad
Recipe is from the USDA.

- Ingredients**
- 1 grapefruit, peeled
 - 1 orange, peeled
 - 10 cups of fresh lettuce
 - 1 small red onion, sliced thin
- For the dressing:
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
 - 1 tablespoon lime juice
 - 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
 - 1 tablespoon water
 - 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
 - 1/4 teaspoon cumin
- Directions**
- Cut the fruit into bite-sized pieces. Toss with lettuce and onion. Mix the ingredients for the dressing. Drizzle it over the salad and toss just before serving.

Using Herbs to Flavor Meals

Herbs are a great way to add a punch of flavor to your food and are easy to find grown locally.

Here are some ways to use herbs from area farmers to liven up your family's food.

BASIL

Basil's wide, green leaves are great in pesto, on pizzas or in pasta sauces. To prepare basil, gently tear or chop the leaves. Try not to bruise them. You can store fresh basil on the counter in a jar of water, covered loosely, for about a week.

Look for colorful purple basil or spicy cinnamon basil. Lemon basil has a citrusy zing to it, and Greek basil is as beautiful as it is tasty. It makes an ideal garnish.

CILANTRO

Popular in Latin dishes, cilantro is at home in salsas, curries and salads. Leaves and stems can be chopped or left whole. To store fresh cilantro, refrigerate with the stems in a jar of water, covered loosely, for about a week.

If cilantro tastes like soap to you, you may have a variation in a group of olfactory-receptor genes that make them taste the soapy-flavored aldehydes in the herb's leaves.

DILL

A classic accompaniment to fish, dill is also at home in dips, soups, salads and pickles. Chop



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or tear the leaves for use in dishes, or use the whole sprig for flavoring. Store fresh dill in a plastic bag with a damp paper towel for about a week.

Dill Chicken Salad

Recipe is from AllRecipes.com.

Ingredients

1/4 cup pecans
1 lemon, juiced
2 tablespoons fresh dill
1 teaspoon white sugar

1/2 cup mayonnaise
1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
1 stalk celery, minced,
2 pounds cooked chicken breasts, shredded
1/4 cup chicken broth
Salt and pepper, to taste

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread the pecans onto a baking sheet and toast them in a preheated oven until the nuts start to turn golden brown and become fragrant, about 10 minutes. Cool the pecans,

then chop and set aside.

2. Whisk the lemon juice, dill, sugar, mayo and yogurt together until smooth. Stir in celery, pecans and chicken. Stir in chicken broth, as needed, until you get your preferred texture. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

OREGANO

Oregano is at home in pasta sauces, salad dressings, soups, marinades and on pizza. It pairs well with dark meats and many vegetables. Store fresh

oregano in a plastic bag in the fridge with a damp paper towel for about a week.

PARSLEY

Parsley pairs well with meat, fish, tofu, citrus, vegetables and dairy products. Use it in sauces, dips, salsas, soups and as a garnish. Prepare it by chopping or tearing the leaves; whole sprigs can be used for flavoring. Store fresh parsley in the refrigerator in a plastic bag with a damp paper towel for up to a week.

Buying Local Cheeses

While most people are accustomed to buying cheese at their local grocery store, you may be surprised by what is available from farmers around you.

Here are some cheese-buying tips from Anne Saxelby, part owner of Saxelby Cheesemongers, and The Cheese Professor.

BE OPEN

Don't be intimidated by cheese shopping. Most shoppers, Saxelby says, don't know about cheese. So don't be embarrassed. Farmers and cheesemongers alike want to sell cheese and they want you to have a good experience.

AND BE OPEN TO NEW THINGS

That starts with knowing what you like. If that's cheddar, then it's cheddar. Think about what you like about your favorite cheddar. Is it salty? The texture? A good cheesemonger will guide you to other kinds of cheeses with those qualities.

Saxelby recommends tasting as many cheeses as you can. Treat it like an ice cream shop and be respectful of the farmer's time or the seller's time, as well as other shoppers.

"The fun of buying cheese is being able to taste and educate yourself," she says. "The only way to educate is to taste as



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often as you can."

ASK FOR A FAVORITE

Still stuck? Saxelby says to ask the cheese shop or the farmer for their own favorite cheese. They may have a particular favorite variety or even farm. Saxelby says she is partial to Twig Farm, from

Vermont, and a raw goat's milk cheese called Goat Tomme.

DON'T GO CRAZY

Know how much cheese you need. Are you planning a party? Have a recipe? Just want some cheese to nibble? Saxelby says for a dinner party with cheese or a grazable cheese

plate, grab three to five varieties, with two or three ounces of each cheese for each person attending.

"You don't need tons," she says.

STORING CHEESE

Saxelby says cheese paper is a storage method designed to

let the cheese breathe. Parchment paper or aluminum foil are good substitutes. Plastic wrap could make the cheese taste like plastic and the extra air in plastic bags could make the cheese go stale. Also, cheese doesn't go bad, Saxelby says. "It's already fermented milk. It's on its life trajectory."

A Guide to Buying Honey

Honey is a popular product from farms around the country, and if you know what to look for, can be a sweet treat with more nuance and complexity than fine wines. Keep reading to learn more about buying honey.

WHAT IS HONEY?

It may not be what you think. Bees collect nectar from flowers and store it in a specialized stomach, which infuses the nectar with enzymes. When honeybees come back to the hive, they share the nectar through their proboscis (a hollow tongue-like appendage). The bee eventually deposits the nectar into a cell in the hive and continues the process until all the cells are full.

The bees then wait for the nectar to age in the hive, with water evaporating out of the nectar to create a sticky, thick honey. That honey is a store of food to keep bees going over the winter months.

FLOWER POWER

Lots of honey is labeled with the flowers the honeybees pollinated, such as orange blossom honey. And while bees do tend to have a favorite flower, they will



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peruse other kinds as well.

Honey is graded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. No physical inspection is required, though, and the honey is so filtered it may not be able to be tested to see if there is residual pollen. Shady packers may use other kinds of processing, such as high heat and pressures, to make

the end product more clear and to hide that it may be from China or other countries not allowed to sell honey in America.

BUYING LOCAL

Serious Eats' expert, Whendi Grad of Big Island Bees, says a lot of mass-market honey is made by

factory-farmed bees fed on sugar, not nectar.

The way around this is to buy from small-scale producers from local farmers markets.

Look for honey that is unfiltered or raw, but be aware those terms are not regulated. Smaller producers are more likely to be selling actual

honey than bigger brands.

KEEPING HONEY

Store honey in a cool, dark place. If the honey crystallizes, soak it in a hot water bath to make it smooth and pourable again. Honey can't be stored forever, though, and it can ferment into a crude form of mead.

Visit a You-Pick Farm

Most Americans grab their produce from a bin at the grocery store or a table at the farmers market.

While the latter is probably fresher and gets you a little closer to the production process, nothing gets you closer than heading out to a you-pick farm.

FINDING A FARM

There are several online directories of you-pick farms near you. Upickfarmlocator.com is one, and allows you to search by produce and location. It lists days and times the farm is open, but be aware that the weather and other concerns may change those. It's always best to call before you go.

More questions to consider asking, Upickfarmlocator says, are:

- What is available for picking and when?
- Do you offer pre-picked fruits and vegetables?
- What forms of payment are accepted?
- What is the cost of picking?
- Is there a fee to spend the day at the farm?
- What other activities are available?
- Do I need to bring my own containers?
- Are pets allowed?
- Is there a picnic area or playground?

You can find you-pick farms



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through your state's Department of Agriculture, by following signs in some farm-rich areas and by asking family and friends. Make an adventure of it by planning to visit a couple of farms or nearby state or local parks. This is a great time to look for

local festivals you may not have known about.

Other sites to consider include pickyourown.org and localharvest.org.

PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

Remember when you visit

that farms are not parks. There are going to be animals doing animal things, and it's likely going to be dirty. Wear comfortable walking shoes and clothing that can get dirt or mud (or worse) on them. Dress for the weather and have a plan for what you're

going to do with your produce. It's easy to get carried away and pick more than you intended, so be aware of how much you have and how much you need. Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated as you work and have a plan for refreshments.