

EAT LOCAL, EVEN IN WINTER – PART 1¹

Judi Gerber©

While winter is still over a month away, many people have already had to deal with the harsh reality that their local farmers' market has closed for the season. Is it really possible to eat locally² even in the winter? That depends on where you live. While many markets are seasonal, cooler climates do have their share of year-round farmers' markets. You just have to know where to look.

There are some things to know about winter farmers' markets before you set out to shop at one. They may not be held as frequently as your spring and summer market, and the hours may fluctuate due to extreme weather conditions. And, don't go expecting the same large variety of fresh produce that you find at a summer farmers' market or, even in the supermarket in winter since those fresh peaches on supermarket shelves in winter aren't locally grown but come from South America.

But, there are still plenty of items to choose from. Some of the items that you can find at a local winter's farmers' market include apples, kale, onions, potatoes, turnips, winter squashes like butternut and acorn squash, pears, leeks, and even lemons, grapefruit, and tangerines in warmer states.

The other items that you normally find in spring and summer markets can still be found including cheese, organic and grass fed meats, chicken, fish, fresh baked goodies, jams, jellies, syrups, and honey. Not surprisingly, hot, prepared foods are one of the most popular items at winter markets.

EAT LOCAL, EVEN IN WINTER – PART 2³

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Last week, I wrote about a couple of ways to eat fresh, local produce even in the winter: either by shopping at a winter farmers' market or joining a winter CSA. As I noted, these options may not be available to everyone so I wanted to offer some alternatives. But first, I wanted to point out something in case you are feeling bad that you can't eat everything (or even anything) locally grown. To start with, while it is an admirable goal to want to eat everything local, it's just not always practical or even possible. That's why one of the suggestions made by the Eat Local Challenge is "to choose five foods that you can source locally." Note they say foods, not necessarily produce. As they say, "try to incorporate a few locally grown items, focus on what you can get, locally raised beef, poultry or pork, eggs, and even honey are examples."

¹ Care2, healthy & green living, November 08, 2010

² Judi Gerber, Resolve to Support a Healthier Food System in 2010, Care2, healthy & green living, January 04, 2010

³ Care2, healthy & green living, November 15, 2010

You also might want to remember to eat with the seasons, like our ancestors did, and think about why certain food traditions are associated with certain seasons. After all, at one time, those foods were all that was available. It's also cheaper to eat with the seasons. The Eat Local Challenge also suggests to at least buy locally produced items like bread, pastries, coffee and jams even though they aren't always sourced with local ingredients. As they say, "the next best thing is to buy them from local businesses: coffee purveyors who source their beans carefully and roast locally, bakers who buy the best wheat they can and make daily bread in the next town over, artisans who buy citrus from a reputable farm and make a local marmalade. You're still keeping some of your dollars local and supporting local businesses."

Another great option to finding local food is through a food cooperative. Food coops are customer or worker owned businesses that provide high quality, good value grocery items to its members. Most coops usually support local family farms. Coops can be either retail stores or buying clubs. Like a CSA, a buying club allows members to order food for regular delivery. The difference is that you pay-as-you-go instead of up front and you can order as often or as little as you want. Typical items include artisan meats and cheeses, raw dairy products, eggs, poultry, grains and heirloom varieties of produce.

Preserving food while it's in season by pickling, canning, freezing or dehydrating fresh summer/fall produce for late fall and winter consumption is another idea encouraged by The Eat Local Challenge. While it's too late to do that this year, try to include this in your food plans for next year.

Growing some of your own produce is another way to increase your local consumption. You can do what farmers who grow throughout the winter do; invest in a greenhouse, a hoop house (a tunnel covered with clear plastic), or a cold frame.

Finally, remember: be realistic and sensible about what works for you, where you live, and for your lifestyle. If you can't find local foods, then try to buy or find things that are sourced from fair-trade companies, or even try to find some local produce at natural foods stores like Sprouts and Whole Foods. They still market "locally" grown even in the winter.