



Food Guide

“Seasoning” Your Kitchen

Making the switch to eating local and seasonal foods often means adopting new and unfamiliar foods into your diet. It also means emphasizing fresh fruits and vegetables during their harvest and availability periods and frozen, canned, and dried versions when fruits and vegetables are not available fresh from harvest or storage. With a bit of attention to menu planning and recipe selection, your diet can become more local and your kitchen will be well “seasoned.”

Many foods listed in the Northeast Regional Food Guide are available year-round—milk, yogurt, and cheese; dry beans, nuts, eggs, poultry, fish, and meat; and bread, cereal, pasta, tortillas, and whole grains. But other foods—particularly fruits and vegetables—are available seasonally. Thus eating fruits and vegetables grown in the Northeast means learning about the different forms in which they are available—fresh, canned, frozen, dried, or stored—during different seasons.

This fact sheet suggests ways to use fruits and vegetables as they become available season by season. Bon appetit!

Spring

It’s exciting when spring produce becomes available because it means the long winter is really over. Enjoy eating lots of greens—they’re very healthy. Turnip and mustard greens are an excellent source of vitamin A and calcium, as are oriental vegetables such as bok choy. Spring is the best time to enjoy local rhubarb, asparagus, garlic scapes, and strawberries.

Try the following ideas:

- Stir-fry bok choy (Chinese cabbage): separate the leaves from the stalks and chop both coarsely. Cook quickly in a hot wok or frying pan with sesame oil, adding the stalks and then the leaves. Season with soy sauce and serve over rice. For additional flavor and protein, try adding tofu, beef, pork, or chicken to the stir fry.
- Sauté mustard or other greens with garlic, onions, salt, and pepper. Serve as a side dish or over pasta or rice.
- Enjoy fresh salads made with many greens. Lettuce, spinach, mustard, arugula, tat soi, mizuna, and dandelion can all be mixed together (sometimes called “mesclun” mix, pronounced “maycloon”) for a healthy and tasty spring salad.
- Savor the first peas of the season by eating them raw at lunchtime or as a snack.
- Many local herbs are at their peak in spring—use them in salad dressings and seasonings and in sauces for meat, fish, or poultry.

Summer

Summer is the peak season for peaches, cherries, raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, and melons. Many of our favorite vegetables such as tomatoes and sweet corn are best when picked at the peak of ripeness and eaten fresh. This is a great time of year to visit a farmers’ market, roadside farm stand, or U-pick farm.

Here are some ideas for summer treats:

- Eat fruit salad for breakfast, or for a dessert treat top it with yogurt from a local dairy.
- Try a salad of fresh local tomatoes sliced and topped with chopped fresh basil and pressed garlic over a bed of greens or one of chopped peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, and crumbled feta cheese.
- Grill fresh sweet corn in the husk with your summertime barbecues. If the corn is very fresh, it needs very little cooking and can even be eaten raw.
- Steam or sauté summer squash and top with a local goat or grated hard cheese and fresh basil for an easy side dish.
- Add fresh vegetables—onions, peppers, tomatoes, squash, and eggplant—to kebobs, or try all-vegetable kebobs at picnics and barbecues.
- In very hot weather enjoy gazpacho—cold soup made from tomatoes and cucumbers.
- Make pancakes with buckwheat, an important northeastern grain, and top with fresh berries for breakfast.

Fall

Fall is the peak time for broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage. Broccoli thrives in the cool weather and is a good source of vitamins A and C and calcium. Fall is also a good time to enjoy grapes, grape juice, pears, and apples.

Savor fall produce:

- Warm up with leek and potato soup.

- Roast pumpkin seeds in a hot skillet, adding a little salt. But beware—this tasty treat is very high in fat and calories. So even though these seeds contain important vitamins and minerals such as folic acid and iron, enjoy this snack in moderation.
- Enjoy apples and pears, applesauce, and fruit baked in crisps and pies.
- For an easy meal sauté chopped broccoli with garlic (add thinly sliced beef, tofu, or chicken if you like) and toss with cooked pasta.
- Toss steamed cauliflower with chopped parsley and a little vinegar.
- Drink hot apple cider for a real treat on a cool fall day.

Winter

Winter vegetables grow during the summer, are harvested in the fall, and can be stored for use throughout the winter. Some fruits, such as apples and pears, also store well. Many winter vegetables are familiar standards such as potatoes, onions, carrots, cabbage, beets, and winter squash. But many more that may be less familiar are nutritious and can add variety to your winter diet. Have you tried Jerusalem artichokes, parsnips, burdock, kohlrabi, celeriac, turnips, or rutabagas?

Winter vegetables are nutritious. One whole potato supplies one-third of the vitamin B6 and vitamin C needed each day. One cup of cooked beets supplies one-quarter of the needed folic acid. One-half cup of baked butternut squash provides nearly 100 percent of recommended vitamin A intake, 50 percent of vitamin C, and is a good source of potassium. One cup of raw Jerusalem artichoke provides 5.1 mg of iron, which is about half of the recommended intake

for men and children and a third of the recommended intake for women. With good planning, you can have a nutritionally adequate diet by eating seasonally, even during the winter.

Winter vegetables are easy to use:

- Cut winter squash in half, scoop out the seeds, place upside down in one inch of water in a baking pan, and microwave for 10–15 minutes on high, or bake in a conventional oven at 350° for 30–45 minutes until soft. For a real treat, drizzle maple syrup over baked squash.
- Shred carrots, red cabbage, and daikon and toss with a walnut vinaigrette dressing for a colorful winter salad—no lettuce necessary.
- Cut root vegetables such as carrots, parsnips, beets, sweet potatoes, turnips, and rutabagas into half-inch fingers (or “fries”) and roast together with whole garlic cloves for a tasty and healthy side dish. Season with dried rosemary for extra flavor.
- Combine potatoes, parsnips, carrots, and onions with chicken, beef, or beans to make a wonderfully nutritious and hearty stew.
- Sauté garlic and onions, add cubed carrots and turnips, and season with thyme and oregano for a delicious winter dish.
- Bake potatoes and top them with nonfat yogurt, chopped red onions, and shredded cheese for a quick and easy light meal or side dish.
- Boil beets, peel them, then marinate in vinegar and garlic, or shred raw beets into a salad for a healthy and colorful addition.
- Use canned tomato paste or puree as a good winter source of vitamin C.

- Peel and slice kohlrabi to replace broccoli (which is not harvested in the Northeast during the winter) in most recipes. Kohlrabi can be eaten cooked or raw and is excellent with carrot sticks at lunchtime or as a snack.
- Replace celery, a summertime crop in the Northeast, with celeriac, a closely related root vegetable, as a seasoning in soups.
- Blend fruits frozen from the summer harvest with low-fat yogurt to make a refreshing smoothie treat in the winter.

Resources to Help You Season Your Kitchen

The Farmer’s Market Cookbook: Seasonal Dishes Made from Nature’s Freshest Ingredients by Richard Ruben. Guilford, Conn.: The Lyons Press. 2000.

The FoodBook—For a Sustainable Harvest. By Elizabeth Henderson and David Stern. First edition 1994. Second printing, spring 1995. Order from Rose Valley Farm, 4209 Covell Road, Rose, NY 14542-0149.

Fresh from the Farmers’ Market: Year-Round Recipes for the Pick of the Crop by Janet Kessel Fletcher and Victoria Pearson. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, LLC. 1997.

From Asparagus to Zucchini—A Guide to Farm-Fresh, Seasonal Produce. Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition (MACSAC). 1996. MACSAC, 4915 Monona Drive, Suite 304, Monona, WI 53716. Telephone: 608-226-0300, e-mail: macsac@wrdc.org.

Local Flavors: Cooking and Eating from America’s Farmers’ Markets by Deborah Madison, Laurie Smith, and Patrick McFarlin. New York: Random House, 2002.

Recipes from an Ecological Kitchen—Healthy Meals for You and the Planet. By Lorna J. Sass. New York: William Morrow, 1992.



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