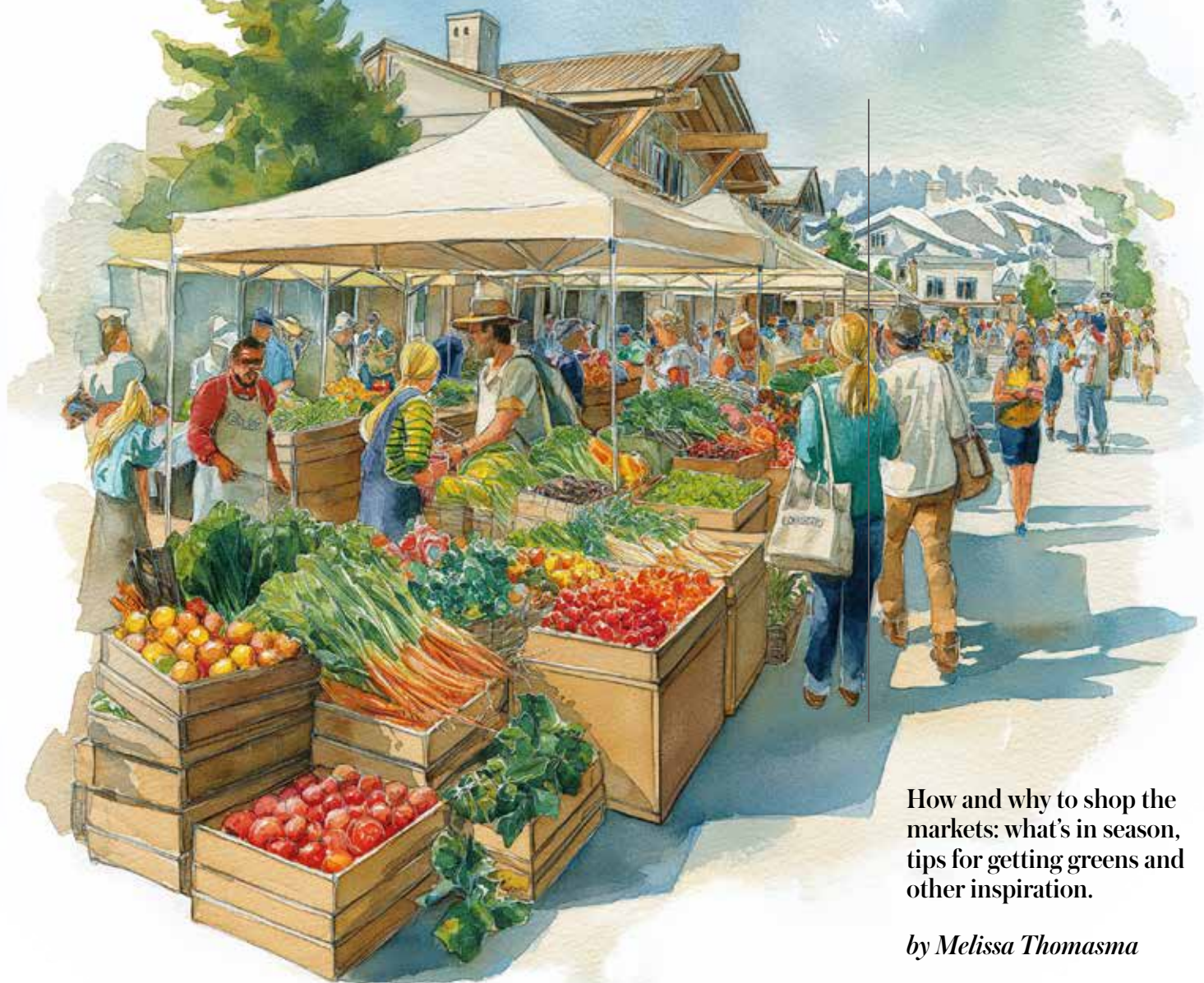


A Lesson In How to Make the Most of Farmers Market Season



How and why to shop the markets: what's in season, tips for getting greens and other inspiration.

by Melissa Thomasma



It's not uncommon for a line to form in front of the more popular stands 15 minutes or more before the markets open.

FYI, some vendors charge extra when you pay with a card.

Before filling your bags, do a lap around the market to see what your options are.

While farmers markets are full of locally crafted delights — from breads, flowers and pastries to locally raised meats and handmade cheeses — the produce stands are often the stars of the show. Piles of just-picked greens, baskets of bright berries and fragrant tomatoes offer a snapshot of the growing season at its very best. Farmers markets are also where many shoppers' confidence can waver when they're faced with how to choose unfamiliar ingredients or what to do with fresh produce once they get home.

In a region where the growing season is short but spectacular, vegetable stands offer some of the freshest ingredients you'll find anywhere — often harvested

just hours before they appear on the table. Farmers grow for flavor rather than long-distance shipping, which means the produce is vibrant, intensely seasonal and best enjoyed while it lasts.

Consider this your no-nonsense guide to choosing, cooking, storing and savoring local produce this season.

HOW DO YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF A TRIP TO A FARMERS MARKET?

Start early — and take a lap.

"Shop early for the best choices," says Jenny Shervin, manager of the Jackson Hole Farmers Market. "Certain things sell out quickly once they come into season. Do a full lap before you start

shopping. We have such a variety — you can literally shop for everything."

From produce and bread to butter, spices, desserts and meats, you can find all the ingredients needed for an entire meal (or two!).

What if there's something you absolutely don't want to miss?

"If there's something you have to have, go to that stand first and get in line," says Dale Sharkey of Cosmic Apple Gardens. Popular seasonal items can get snapped up quickly, and when they're sold out? They're gone.

Bring your patience and some cash.

Many vendors prefer to be paid in cash, though plenty are set up for digital payments, too. Shervin reminds people to remember that patience is key. Lines can occasionally stretch, but instead of frustration, see it as an opportunity to meet someone, enjoy the market vibe, try new things and come home with a haul.

WHY DOES MARKET PRODUCE TASTE BETTER?

Because these fruits and vegetables are grown for flavor and harvested at the right moment.

"It's a completely different product than you'll find at the grocery store," Sharkey says. "We grow things for taste, not for transport longevity."

"Vegetables start breaking down the second they're harvested," Sharkey explains. "The sooner they get from the farm to your table, the better they're going to taste."

The science agrees: Once produce is harvested, it begins to internally convert sugars into starches, and flavor begins to fade. Faster to you means it tastes exactly as it should.



Food from the market is more nutritious.

“From the freshness of it to the way it’s grown and harvested, it’s better for you,” says Curtis Haderlie of Haderlie Farms. Local farms like his often focus on soil health and growing practices that support nutrient-rich crops and avoid harmful chemicals or pesticides — meaning what ends up at the stand can both be fresher and pack a bigger nutritional punch.

WHAT IF ...

I see an ingredient that I don't recognize?

Ask the farmer! “Farmers love to talk about vegetables,” Sharkey says. “There shouldn’t be any shyness around saying, ‘What is this and how do I use it?’”

From garlic scapes to unusual mushrooms — or unexpected varieties of more familiar fare — growers are often eager to share cooking tips or recipes.

I don't know what is in season?

“Ask them what’s awesome this week,” Sharkey says. “Things aren’t in season for long.”

Haderlie encourages shoppers — especially families with potentially hesitant younger eaters — to embrace curiosity.

“Don’t be intimidated to ask questions,” he says. “Have a conversation and learn more.”

I don't know how to use or prepare a certain item?

Farmers usually have great tips, but most high-quality produce doesn’t take much to prepare. “There’s this idea that great ingredients require a lot of technique,” says Addison Fleming, Snake River Grill’s executive chef. “But honestly, the point is not to over-manipulate them.”

Simple preparations often produce the best results. “You can almost build a salad right there at the market,” Fleming says. Fresh greens, local berries, a drizzle of honey and a splash of something acidic can quickly become a vibrant summer dish.

“You can make something totally unique to Jackson Hole without even turning on the stove,” he says. He notes that this is particularly appealing for folks traveling through; you don’t need a full kitchen to taste the best the market has to offer.

Staying away from the stove in a place where many houses don't have air conditioning in the summer is an added bonus!

HOW TO STORE ...

A few simple habits make a big difference and can keep your produce haul looking (and tasting) its best all week.

Fresh herbs:

It’s ideal to place most fresh herbs in a cup or jar of water, cover loosely with a plastic bag and refrigerate. Basil, however, is too sensitive for this treatment and tends to do better in water on the counter — like fresh flowers.

WANT A GREAT ALL-SEASON DRESSING?

COSMIC APPLE'S BASIL VINAIGRETTE

- 1 garlic scape, chopped, or garlic clove, grated
- 1 cup packed basil
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Puree garlic, basil and vinegar. Turn on blender, add oil and turn off immediately. Add to fresh greens, drizzle on grilled veggies or enjoy on pasta salad.



WHERE TO MARKET

JACKSON HOLE FARMERS MARKET

Town Square, Jackson
Saturdays | 8 a.m.–12 p.m.
June 20–August 29,
September 5–26, 8 a.m.–1 p.m.

Teton Village Commons
Thursdays, 4–7 p.m.,
July 2–August 20

JACKSON HOLE PEOPLE'S MARKET

Center for the Arts Lawn
Wednesdays | 4–7 p.m.
June 3–September 23

STAR VALLEY FARMERS MARKET

Marge Grover Memorial Park,
Alpine
Thursdays | 4–7 p.m.
July 2–September 10

TETON VALLEY FARMERS MARKET

Driggs Plaza – 60 S. Main St.
Fridays | 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
June 5–October 2

Victor City Park – 80 N. Main St.
Tuesdays | 4–7 p.m.
July 14–September 25

Leafy greens:

Lettuce, spinach and other leafy veggies should be stored in a sealed bag in the refrigerator so they don't dry out.

"Water is kind of the enemy for vegetables," Sharkey notes. Washing produce only when you're ready to use it can help extend freshness.

Root vegetables:

Carrots, radishes and their root-related cousins should have their leafy tops removed right away. "If you leave the greens on, they'll pull water from the root, leaving it rubbery," Fleming explains.

But don't toss those greens — we suggest blending them into your next batch of pesto.

Tomatoes:

These gems should stay on the counter — not in the refrigerator — and are best eaten within a few days.

Berries:

Surprisingly, berries can last longer when rinsed briefly in hot water and thoroughly dried before refrigeration, which helps eliminate mold spores.

When not completely dried, they can mold, so be careful to dry them!



MARKET TOMATOES ARE LIKE EDIBLE GOLD. HERE ARE SOME IDEAS (BESIDES SALAD) TO MAKE THEM SHINE ...

When tomatoes hit peak season, Fleming has some go-to prep strategies.

Broiled Sourdough Toast

Slice ripe tomatoes onto thick sourdough, season with salt and pepper, and broil until softened and lightly caramelized.

Blistered Tomatoes for Steak or Pork

After searing meat, toss whole cherry tomatoes into a hot pan with sliced onions and fresh basil. Let them blister, season with salt and pepper and spoon over sliced steak or pork.

Sungolds with Skyr

Halve Sungold tomatoes and scatter over skyr. Drizzle with Canewater olive oil, season with salt and pepper and enjoy with bread — or straight from the bowl.

HOW TO PRESERVE ...

Blanch and freeze:

Food science research from Serious Eats recommends briefly blanching vegetables before freezing to maintain color, flavor and texture.

Cut vegetables into smaller pieces, blanch them for one to three minutes in boiling water, dry thoroughly and freeze them quickly on a tray before transferring them to airtight bags.

Some vegetables — such as zucchini, eggplant and tomatoes — freeze better after cooking. Turning them into soups or sauces before freezing can produce better results when thawed later.

Olive oil cubes:

Instead of letting fresh herbs go to waste, chop them up and mix with olive oil. Then freeze in an ice cube tray — you'll have herby flavor bombs that last for months. Toss into sauces, defrost and add to a salad dressing or use in dip for bread.



HOW TO SELECT THE BEST ...

Tomatoes

Heavy for their size. Deep color. Slight give when pressed. A fragrant stem smell is a great sign.

Corn

Bright green husks and slightly sticky silk. Kernels should feel full through the husk.

Carrots

Firm, smooth, vibrant color. If tops are attached, they should be bright green and fresh-looking.

Greens

Crisp leaves, vibrant color. No wilting or slimy spots.

Berries

Fully colored, plump, no crushed fruit or mold in the container.

Peaches

Fragrant and slightly soft near the stem. Hard, odorless peaches were picked too early.

WHY TO SHOP THIS WAY

For many, it's as much about community as it is about food. "You can come and stay for the whole event," Shervin says. "We want it to be a full community experience."

For the farmers themselves, that connection is part of the reward. "It's a lot of work to get there," Sharkey says, "but it's incredibly satisfying to be there with the community."

In a region where summer passes quickly, the farmers market offers a chance to slow down, celebrate the season and savor the incredible food growing right outside our doors.

