



Hints and Tips for your Farmers Market Purchases

Let's be sure your trip to the farmers market is fruitful. Here are a few hints and tips that will help you purchase the right products and maintain them for a flavorful meal.

Shopping Suggestions

1. Ask questions. Who better to ask how to prepare and store food than the person who grew it? Farmers can often share great tips for selecting, storing and keeping foods fresh. You may even walk away with an old family recipe.
2. Select fresh fruit by its aroma, not its color. Ripe fruit has a nice, light aroma of the fruit. Unripe fruit has no aroma. Over ripe fruit has an overpowering aroma. Many tree fruits, such as peaches, will continue to ripen once picked. Berries, however, do not continue to ripen.
3. Summer squash, peppers and eggplant that are fresh from the field are hard, not soft. If they give slightly or feel limp, put them back.
4. If you want intense flavor from garlic, select a hard neck variety.
5. Loin lamb chops, center cut pork chops and T-bone steaks are the same cut of meat, just from different animals.
6. Dark green and red leaf lettuces have a higher nutritional value than iceberg lettuce.
7. A shiny zucchini is a sign of freshness. If the skin is dull, then it has lost its freshness.
8. Buy quantities for the freezer or preserve in the height of the season when quantities are the greatest and the prices the lowest.
9. Some recipes are very specific about the variety of fruits or vegetables to use, for example, a recipe may call for Granny Smith apples. Rather than get frustrated because you can't find the exact variety called for, ask the farmer what other fruit or vegetable would make a good substitute. They know the qualities of their produce and can easily find a substitute that will work just as well in your recipe.
10. An easy way to tell if a melon is ripe is to look at the stem end. There should be no partial stem present, it should be smooth, as a ripe melon will "Slip" its stem when picked.
11. Peaches will continue to ripen after being picked.

What's in Season

1. The old adage that sweet corn needs to go immediately from the field to the boiling pot is no longer the case. Modern varieties will hold their sugar content for several days if stored in the refrigerator with the husks still on.
2. When picked, some fruit will continue to ripen, while for others all ripening is halted. The ripening process can be continued post-pick with tomatoes, apples and peaches; place in a closed brown paper bag to promote ripening (thanks to natural gases emitted). Unfortunately, berries and grapes do not continue to ripen.
3. Cabbage heads can be compact or loose, and leaves can be tightly packed or ruffled, depending on the variety. Look for crisp, brightly colored leaves that are free of brown spots. The head should be heavy for its size. Refrigerate in a plastic bag or container.





4. Choose a butternut squash that is heavy, with smooth, butterscotch colored skin and bright orange flesh. The stem should be intact and dry, not moist or blackened.
5. Pure honey tends to crystallize. If you have honey that never seems to crystallize, it is probably not pure honey, even if the label says it is. If your honey does crystallize, put the sealed jar in a bowl of warm water and allow it to re-liquefy. This will take an hour or two. Once you can stir it, you can use it. Never microwave honey, as too high a heat can alter its flavor and color.
6. Think maple syrup is expensive? Pure maple syrup is the sap of the sugar maple tree, boiled down to proper density. It contains no other ingredients. Consider that it takes 40 gallons of sap to make 1 gallon of syrup, it takes 4 maple trees, at least 40 years old to yield 40 gallons of sap, it takes anywhere from 2 hours to 2 days to boil 800 gallons of syrup (using one cord of wood or 60 gallons of oil), plus the labor of collecting, transporting, filtering, and bottling.
7. Pure maple syrup is the only ingredient in molded maple sugar, granulated maple sugar, and maple spread. Each one is made by additional boiling and then cooling and stirring. Many maple producers also add pure maple syrup to other ingredients to make maple mustard, maple barbeque sauce, maple vinegar, maple salad dressings, maple coated nuts, etc.

Proper Storage

1. Store tomatoes on the kitchen counter, NEVER in the refrigerator. Refrigeration results in watery, tasteless tomatoes.
2. Store herbs, such as basil and parsley upright in a glass of water, just like a bouquet of flowers. The water will keep them fresh and if left long enough will even grow roots!
3. Fresh berries will keep fresher longer if refrigerated unwashed. Wait to wash until you are ready to use them.
4. Never store mushrooms in an airtight container as they can grow harmful bacteria; instead, perforate a plastic bag or purchase ventilated bags. In fact, most fruits and vegetables keep best in a perforated plastic bag.
5. Radishes with the leaves still on them look fresh from the garden, but the leaves steal the water from the radishes so always remove the stems and leaves before storing.
6. Potatoes should be stored in the dark, at a cool, but not cold temperature. Do not refrigerate potatoes, as the cold temperature will cause the starch to convert to sugar, giving them an unpleasant sweet taste.
7. Keep your garlic, unpeeled, in a cool, but not cold, dry location.
8. Store onions in a cool, dry location with plenty of air circulation. Hang in mesh bags or even panty hose will provide proper air flow.
9. Many herbs can be dried to preserve for winter use. Tie them in bunches and hang in a dry, dark environment with air circulation. When dry, store them in a sealed container away from heat and light. (Basil and parsley are the exception. They do not dry well.)
10. Freeze berries and cherries in a single layer on a tray. Once frozen, place them in freezer storage bags or containers. Individually frozen, they will allow you to take out only what you need for your recipe.





11. Too much zucchini? Grate zucchini as you would for zucchini bread, measure out the amount needed for your favorite recipes and freeze in plastic freezer bags. When ready to make your recipe, partially thaw (in the refrigerator) and use the zucchini and juice in your recipe.
12. When freezing flavorings, such as herbs, peppers, celery and celery leaves, freeze in small “recipe-sized” packages.

Using your farmers market purchases

1. There has been a movement to use the entire animal, head-to-tail, when cooking. Take that sustainable philosophy and apply it to veggies, too! Beet and radish greens are especially tasty. And even broccoli stems are delicious when properly prepared. However, carrot greens are not recommended for consumption.
2. Freezing herbs is a great idea that can save you time and money. If you have a favorite recipe, you can even freeze the exact quantities of herbs, already chopped and then placed along with a little water in ice cube trays. When you're ready to use your herbs, just thaw the ice cube or pop it in the fry pan.
3. Think beyond tomatoes, and add other fruits and veggies to your salsa: cucumbers, peppers, corn, watermelon, even diced and cooked carrots, all take salsa to the next level.
4. Find uses for everything. As the fresh veggies come into season, save all the cleaned peelings, odd pieces of veggies, and stems from fresh herbs, throw them in freezer bags and freeze. Then before long you will have the terrific start for making vegetable stock for soups and stews.
5. Yellow summer squash and yellow and green zucchini are all cooked the same way and can be interchangeable or mixed in most recipes.
6. Grass-fed meats should be cooked for less time than grain fed meat.
7. Meats that need to be defrosted quickly can be placed in a container and covered with cold water, never on the counter.
8. Most of the colorful, light purple or white eggplants do not need to be soaked in salt water before cooking. To tenderize the flesh and reduce bitterness, you can “sweat” the eggplant. After cutting the eggplant, sprinkle it with salt and allow it to rest in a colander for about 30 minutes. Then rinse thoroughly to remove most of the salt. This process pulls out some of its water content, so it will absorb less oil used in cooking.
9. Sugar snap peas are entirely edible, don't shell them.
10. Conversion rates for herbs: you will need 3 times as much fresh herbs as dried, due to the condensed oils in dried herbs. So, 1 teaspoon of dried herbs is equivalent to 3 teaspoons of fresh.
11. Make a double batch of eggplant parmesan when eggplants are plentiful. Bake as directed, in a glass baking dish. Cool thoroughly, cover with plastic wrap and then aluminum foil and freeze. Reheat in the microwave or oven when you need a quick winter meal.
12. Store winter squash in a dark area at 55° - 60°F. Most will store anywhere from 1 – 3 months.
13. How you prepare garlic will impact its flavor. When roasted, it has a mild, sweet and caramelized flavor. When finely minced it becomes bolder and when crushed it becomes hotter yet as the compounds that give garlic its unique flavor are brought together through crushing.
14. Granulated maple sugar can be substituted in most recipes that call for granulated white or brown sugar.
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- 16.** Substituting maple syrup for sugar in a recipe may take some experimentation, especially in baking. In general cooking, use only $\frac{3}{4}$ the amount of maple syrup as sugar in a recipe. (for example instead of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, use 3 tablespoons of maple syrup.). In baking for every cup of sugar, substitute $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of maple syrup and reduce the dominant liquid in the recipe by 2 to 4 tablespoons.
- 17.** You can almost always use the same amount of maple syrup for honey in a recipe.
- 18.** When making baked beans using dry navy or pea beans, use maple syrup or maple sugar as the sweetening. About $\frac{3}{4}$ cup syrup per pound of beans.
- 19.** If you want to eat local foods all year long, preserve fresh produce. For information on food preservation contact Cornell Cooperative Extension in your county for classes and recipes or get information on line at the National Center for Home Food Preservation.

