

Culinary Commentary

with Jenny Pitcher, Registered Dietitian

May 2022

Farmer's Markets

I get excited when the calendar rolls over to May because I know that many farmer's markets in Central Ohio will be opening. It feels like a whole new rhythm begins with how I plan my meals and shop for my food. I look forward to my Saturday morning stroll through the farmer's market, which becomes a springboard to meal planning for the week. I can plan my meals around the produce I purchase at the market and sometimes I need just a few extra items at the grocery. If you are new to farmers markets, here are a few things to think about:

- [Localharvest.org](https://localharvest.org) has a list of farmers markets for all of Ohio so you can find one in your area.
- Do some research on the farms/farmers who will be at the market ahead of time – the best way to do this is to visit the website of the market you plan to attend. The farmers typically have a list of what they are harvesting for the week.
- Get to know the farmers. They are so happy to help and are proud to talk about the food they grow for their community!
- Use what you get as a base for meal planning. If you get spinach, carrots, beets, and onions, that could look like:
 - *Whole grain pasta with spinach and feta*
 - [Roasted beet bowls](#) with walnuts and brown rice
 - [Carrot cake energy bites](#) for snacks
 - Make [caramelized onions](#) to top a burger, veggie burger or add to a quesadilla

The more often you shop the farmer's market, the easier it will be to plan from your haul. Just like the grocery store, there are plenty of temptations that are easy to spend time and money on. So, make a list and have an idea of what you are going for. Of course, have fun and be flexible - part of the fun of going to the market is exploring new foods! Here are some other tips to make the most of your visit:

- Plan to go early – many things sell out quick and there is less of a crowd
- Bring your own bags/tote, etc.
- Remember that most of the foods are seasonal and some things won't be at the market for very long. Cherries are a great example – when you find them, buy in bulk, and freeze for later! [Click here](#) for a list of seasonal produce.
- Do a walk through. Don't buy strawberries at the first stall. They might be less expensive or look better a few stalls down.
- Many vendors now take credit/debit cards but have some cash on hand just in case

If you are interested in taking a deeper dive into the difference between certified organic and sustainable farming practices, this [handout](#) provides a nice breakdown. Find a market that you would like to visit, maybe even make it a goal to visit a different market in Central Ohio each weekend. And don't forget, shopping at your local farmer's market is fun, exposes you & your family to new and different foods, and supports local growers who are trying hard to making a living by growing our food.



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