

How to shop the Market

Shopping at farmers markets is the easiest way to eat locally, find fresh foods, and know exactly where your food comes from. A bit of planning keeps shopping for produce at the market fun and cooking a snap all week long.

1. Know Your Seasons

If you know a bit of what to expect when you get to the farmers market, making decisions at each stall is much easier.

2. Go Early or Go Late

Markets tend to be less crowded right when they open or just before they close. For the best selection, go to the farmers market early. The best goods go first and popular items can sell out.

For the best deals, go to the farmers market late. Farmers and other vendors often prefer to discount products instead of loading them back up. Farmers raise this food for a living, so don't expect or ask for deep discounts.

3. Bring Big Bags & Small Change

Make sure everything gets home from the farmers market without spoiling or crashing onto the sidewalk by bringing your own sturdy canvas or nylon bags. A backpack can make the hauling easier, especially for weighty or bulky items. Planning to purchase meat? Bring a cool bag along too.

Purchases will go easier and faster if you have exact (or close to exact) change.



4. Plan Meals Ahead of Time

you'll know both how many bunches of asparagus to buy and that you'll also need some spring onions or herbs to add to the soup and some salad greens.

5. Plan For Spontaneity

You need to leave a bit of wiggle room for those strawberries you didn't know would be at market so early, or the zucchini blossoms you've never tried before. Trying new things is part of the fun of going to farmers markets.

6. Work In Volume

The best deals at the farmers market are had when you buy in bulk. You'll enjoy the best flavors and the best prices when you buy lots of whatever is at its harvest peak. How to use it all up? Try new recipes with favorite vegetables or learn the lost art of preserving food. Freezing, canning, and drying are just some of the ways you can save seasonal tastes you find at the farmers market for later in the year.



7. Think "Whole Foods"

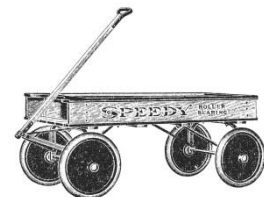
Carrots come whole and unpeeled. Beets still have greens (and dirt) attached. Learning to handle just-harvested produce can take some getting used to, but the superior flavor is worth the adjustment.

8. Get Advice

If you find a vegetable that's new to you at the farmers market and want to give it a try, ask the farmer how to prepare it. For the best tips, specifically ask how they like to eat it.

9. Invest in Wheels

If you buy a lot every week, consider acquiring a wheeled cart, stroller or wagon to get your haul from the farmers market home in one trip. (But please, oh please, pay extra attention to fellow shoppers as you push or pull your wheels through the market!)



10. Keep It Simple

You're buying ultra-fresh produce when you shop at the farmers market, so let its natural flavor show when you cook it. Keep preparations simple. You'll make cooking easier and you'll be likely to try (and eat) even more local foods from the farmers market next week.

Tips for saving money at the Market



1. Get to Know Your Farmer (a.k.a. Be a Regular!)

Regulars at farmers markets, like elsewhere, get deals - an extra head of lettuce thrown in, for example, or an herb bouquet. Also, when you regularly shop at a specific stand you get a sense of their stock and will be able to better spot existing deals (Whoa Nellie but they have a lot of beets this week!).



2. Buy In Bulk

The more you buy, the more likely you are to get a deal. There are often deals to be had on flats of strawberries, bushels of apples, and 20-pound boxes of tomatoes. Of course, to buy in those amounts you need to have a plan for freezing, canning, or otherwise preserving your haul.

Bulk purchases can often be arranged in advance. Many farmers are good at estimating how much produce they will sell at a given market, and will appreciate the advance notice to bring extra goods.

3. Make It Easy

It's just polite. Don't try to arrange a special deal when a stand is five-deep in happy non-deal-seeking buyers. If you ask for a deal on an entire box of plums, have a way to carry those plums to your car yourself. Have bags, reasonably correct change or at least small bills to work from, and generally make giving you a deal easy for the vendor. It will make it all the more likely that you'll get a good deal the next time you ask.

4. Ask and Offer

You can always ask for a discount if buying large quantities or regularly. Keep these basics in mind:

- Be friendly and polite, of course
- Don't offer too little – it insults the vendor
- Have cash in hand

5. Shop In Bad Weather

It's sad but true, bad weather brings out great deals at the farmers market. Fewer customers also means there is simply more time to talk to the farmers and learn what the best deals they have are. Perhaps the sweet peas are going gangbusters this year or they have a bumper crop of nectarines.

Source: <http://localfoods.about.com>

Get *fresh* at the Market
food, art, music, activities, and fun!