

Go Local

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Buying local has become a popular trend – and for good reason. As well as being much better for our planet, buying locally produced food also supports small farming businesses, and gives you the benefit of taking home to your family the most healthful foods you can eat. It's no secret that locally grown foods have the most flavor and nutritional value, as they are the most fresh. So when you buy local, you are buying the best foods around.

To find out where you can go to buy locally grown and harvested foods, try going online. For example, you can find extensive listings at Local Harvest, an organization dedicated to helping consumers find local growers. Visit their website at <http://www.localharvest.org>. You'll find local farmers, restaurants, grocery stores and co-ops, family farms, and more, in your area.

Taking a trip to your neighborhood farm is not the only place to find local foods. Many towns now have farmer's markets that occur from spring into the fall, with local farmers selling their wares in one central location. Check your local paper or go online to see if you can find when and where the farmer's market in your community is held.

Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, is also another way to go in terms of eating and buying locally. People become "members", or "subscribers" to a local farm by paying a prescribed amount for the harvest year – typically late spring through early fall - and then receive a basket of food from the farm every week. Some CSAs will accept payment on a monthly or weekly basis. It's a good, working, symbiotic relationship, helping everyone involved. You receive delicious, fresh produce. The farmer is supported by the people in the community. Not a bad deal, all around.

You may want to explore your town, and the towns in your area, to discover which farms are the most convenient for you, and also which ones carry the foods you are interested in buying. Some major grocery stores sell produce at the local level, but if you're interested in buying foods other than produce, you might have to look a little harder. Some farm stands sell produce and dairy products, but might not offer local eggs or meats. Others might only sell dairy and no produce. You may have to visit one or two places before you get all of your shopping done. But it's worth it when you discover how much tastier, and better for you, locally grown food can be.



If you are interested in joining a CSA, you might want to go to the farm and talk to the people there. Take a walk around and see what they have to offer. Get to know them, a little. It will make the whole experience much richer for you - and you might learn a thing or two about farming, while you're at it.

Other tips and tricks:

Get your hands dirty. Some CSAs require that you put in a few hours in to work for them during the growing season, so don't be surprised if you are asked to do a little bit of farming - and learn something about growing first-hand.

Organic versus inorganic. When buying locally, try to support organic farms, if at all possible. Farms that don't use organic practices spray pesticides on their produce, which contains nitrogen - an additive that makes that apple look red, round, and flawless, but is actually quite flavorless when you bite into it. So even though something looks good, doesn't mean it is. Kind of a life lesson, when you think about it.

Also, some farms don't use pesticides, but are not certified organic. That's because becoming certified costs money – something that many small farms don't have. If you're not sure, just ask. Many farmers are more than willing to divulge their farming practices.

Local versus imported. Buying local inorganic foods is arguably better than buying organic foods that are shipped across the country. Even though produce might be inorganic, it might be better to buy it from your local farmer, anyway. Because it's not traveling anywhere, it's fresher, and therefore might have more nutrients than something coming in on a plane one thousand (or more) miles away. In other words, local is the way to go, organic or not.

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