



By Sheree Clark

Raw-Friendly Markets

Along with the summer season comes all kinds of fabulous fresh produce. And while nothing beats the food you plant, nurture and harvest yourself, the plethora of buying options at this time of year truly makes for raw food Nirvana! Let's look at some of the opportunities that may be available to you over the next few months, depending upon where you live.

Farmers Markets

Farmers market produce is renowned for being locally grown and very fresh (often picked the same day you buy it!). Many markets are carefully managed, adhering to strict guidelines for pricing, quality and vendor selection, while others are more relaxed in their vendor criteria. Although the emphasis is usually on locally grown or produced food and crafts, some farmers markets allow farmers to purchase a percentage of products to resell.

Whether you are a newbie or a seasoned farmers market shopper, here are a few pointers to help you get the most for your time and money:

Plan ahead. Think about how many meals you'll be preparing in the coming week and buy your produce accordingly. Try to avoid bringing home more than you need; it's not a bargain if you end up throwing it away

or composting it!

Waste not. That said, don't throw about-to-go-bad food away. When fruits or vegetables look like they won't get eaten in time, dehydrate them thoroughly and store in an airtight container. Dried fruits can be used in trail mix, while your dehydrated vegetables can garnish a salad or be used in a soup.

Be an early bird. The best vendors are usually also the most popular and they can run out of things early. Arrive at the market soon after it opens for the best selection.

Be a night owl. Shortly before the market is about to close, the farmers will often give drastic reductions. They'll often sell at a drastic discount just to avoid having to haul it away.

Establish relationships. Get to know the farmers and vendors who work the stands you buy from. Tell them what your produce needs are and consider bringing them samples of raw dishes that incorporate items they've grown. Such gestures go a long way in completing the food cycle.

Weed it out. Ask a farmer who uses sustainable growing methods to bring you a box of weeds next time. Weeds are usually discarded, but are often more alkaline-rich and nutritious than the foods cultivated around them. Use

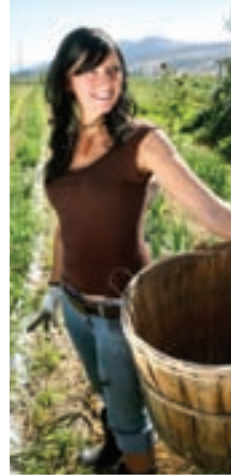
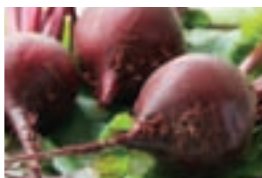
weeds like lamb's quarters, dandelions and purslane in salads and smoothies.

Ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask growers – or even chefs you might see at the market – for tips on food preparation and storage. Even if their recipe ideas are not raw, the suggestions you receive may be adaptable to raw usage or provide you with inspiration.

And ask again. Ask about seconds – misshapen or bruised produce that may be available at a discount. Ask about bulk discounts. Ask what tastes best, where they sell other than at the market and what other vendors they would recommend.

Understand terminology. Most raw fooders believe that organic produce is preferable because it is grown without pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Sometimes growers who call their growing methods "chemical free" actually adhere to organic practices, but simply lack the resources to become certified. Learn to appreciate the differences between growing methods as well as the meaning of terms like "sustainable" and "biodynamic," and buy based on what resonates with you.

Money talks. Bring cash; many vendors do not take credit cards or



checks. Bring small bills and you'll be more efficient because you won't be waiting for change.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Over the past two decades, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. The way it works is that a farmer offers a certain number of shares to the public. Typically a share consists of a weekly box of vegetables. Interested consumers purchase a share (sometimes called a "subscription" or "membership") and in return receive a container of seasonal produce each week throughout the growing season.

A CSA is beneficial for both the farmer and the consumer. The farmer gets to manage cash flow, and can have their products essentially sold before they are produced. The consumer gets fresh food and a relationship with the person who grows it.

In some areas of the country there is more demand than there are CSA farms. If you're lucky enough to have access to a CSA, here are a few things to know:

Manage your expectations. It is not likely that all of your produce needs

will be met by your CSA share. Depending on the size of your family and how much you eat, you will probably need to supplement with additional produce during the week.

Understand seasonality. If you are not used to eating in season, it may be a bit of an adjustment. While the grocery store has a variety of produce available year-round, your CSA box will contain only what is in season in your area at that time. Expect the growing period to start off light and finish with abundance. Some CSA farms provide a list of what to expect and when.

Understand policies. Different farms have different procedures for what happens to your box if you can't pick it up for some reason; ask ahead of time what that policy is. Also ask before you join how much produce you can expect each week and whether extra quantities of certain items might be available for purchase if you are interested.

Visit FoodRoutes.com and The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, Afsic.nal.usda.gov, for more information.

Food Co-operatives (co-ops) are worker- and/or customer-owned businesses that provide grocery items to their members. Co-ops can

be organized as either retail stores or buying clubs. Most food co-ops support their local communities by selling produce grown locally by family farms. Visit LocalHarvest.org and CooperativeGrocer.coop.

Home Delivery

Home delivery services allow you to shop just like you would at the grocery store. Pick the products you want and add them to your online basket. Each delivery will usually arrive on the same day of the week. You can have a standing order of the same items – assuming they're in season – or you can change it up based on your needs or whims.



Shop Online

Can't find a local source for the food you want? Too busy to plant your own? Try online resources such as:

GreenPeople.org

"The world's largest directory of affordable organic foods."

OrganicKitchen.com

An organic foods research and marketing company.

RawPeople.com

A "world community co-op" intent on providing information and member pricing on products.