

YES! **I Want to Eat** **Locally Grown Food**



If eating local food interests *you*, this little booklet will guide you along this delicious path. You can choose to take one step or more, small or large, toward having more locally grown food on your plate.

☞ Why Eat Local Foods?

Do you want the freshest, tastiest, and most healthful food available? Do you want to support the local economy instead of big corporations? Are you concerned about climate change? All are great reasons for “going local” and eating locally grown food.

☞ What Are Local Foods?

Eating local is a *hot* topic these days as more people question where their food is grown. Big corporations long ago took over the job of feeding us and now they are taking over the words *organically grown* and diluting the meaning; but they cannot take over local food. *Local* might be a relative word, but we all know what it means. It means you know where the farm is located and it is not far away. Or your local food may come from regional sources—close by, and locally owned. Many local farmers carry the organic certification, some do not, but when you interact with farmers, you can ask about their agricultural practices.

☞ The “Eat Local” Challenge

Eating local year-round means rethinking your eating habits, and challenging yourself to eat as much food grown locally or regionally as you can. To accept the “eat local” challenge means to live with the reality that foods grow and ripen on their own time and in their own season. You cannot eat a fresh local melon in March, a local bell pepper in May, or a summer squash in January. If you want to “eat local,” you need first to change your eating habits, to consume what is in season. Second, if you want local fruit, tomatoes, potatoes, or green beans in the winter, you need to store or preserve food bought in season. Storing food yourself puts you in partnership with your local farmers. Unlike the big corporations with cold storage facilities allowing them to sell nonseasonal food, the local small farmer grows the food and then counts on each of us to store it for ourselves. But storing and preserving food is not hard. You’ll be surprised at how good the foods taste that you “put up” yourself!

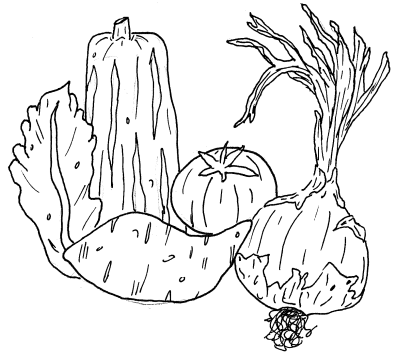
Buying local food at the Farmers' Market, the Silver City Food Co-op, or directly from local farmers is a great place to begin. If you want local food on your plate all through the year, though, you need to take a more active role in your food procurement practices. You will need to learn what is available locally, and how to store these foods for yourself so you can eat them "out-of-season." To transform your eating habits, you need to plan ahead and make a commitment to some level of change. *If you want to eat local, you will have to take the challenge!*

☞ What Can I Do to Eat Locally?

1 Consciously Consider Your Food Choices

- ☞ **Learn where your food is grown.** Read labels. Be curious about your food. Studies show food often travels 1,500 miles to your plate. If possible, eat an apple grown in the Mimbres Valley. An apple from Washington is more local than one from New Zealand or Argentina. Consciously make the "local" choice.
- ☞ **Learn to eat foods *in season*.** Crops naturally grow and mature at different times of the year in different places; and here in Grant County, that means that most crops mature during the summer and fall. Since conventional grocery stores carry foods from all over the world, we can purchase lettuce, apples, citrus, and most every other fresh produce item all year long. Eating local food means eating food in season, at the time of year when it ripens, and perhaps eating a lot of it during that time and not much or at all the rest of the year.

- ☞ **Study the Seasonal Produce Guide on pages 6 and 7.** Compare that information with your shopping list. Make decisions about how you can substitute local foods for your normal choices.



2 Start Buying Locally Grown Food!

- ☞ **Shop more at the Farmers' Market and the Silver City Food Co-op, and look for local food at other grocery stores, too.** Start paying more attention to eating in season.

3 Keep Traditional Storage Foods for the Winter

The foods listed here have traditionally been grown for storage in winter because, with very little effort, they will keep for a long time without any processing. Decide which foods you want to store and, using the following method, figure out how much of each you will need.

Determine how many of a particular food item you would eat each month, then multiply that by the number of months you plan to store it; this will indicate how much to buy. *For example*, if you would eat one winter squash a week (in soups, pies, breads, casseroles, or just plain), you would need four per month. Since winter squash stores well for five months, multiplying the four squash a month times five months of storage will give you the number of squash to buy. At the Farmers' Market in October, buy twenty winter squash for winter storage and you will be able to eat local squash for five whole months!

Garlic Garlic grows through the winter and is harvested in June. After it has dried it will store nicely for six months and will last for at least another three months. During winter, stored garlic will begin to sprout a little, become more dense, and its flavor will intensify. If you have a garlic braid, start from the top and clip each garlic head carefully as you need it.

- ☞ Store the garlic you purchase in a cool, dry, airy place away from the sun. Do not refrigerate.

Onions Onions are harvested from July through September. The early onions are often picked with the greens still vibrant and are not meant for storage. Later in the summer or in the fall, the green tops die back and the onion skins begin to dry out. These onions will be

picked and cured (dried) for a while. Once fully cured, most onions will store for many months, with the ones harvested in late fall often lasting through March. During the winter, onions may begin to sprout a little, but that is okay, since the whole onion, sprout and all, is edible.

☞ As with garlic, store onions in a cool, dry, airy place away from the sun, and do not refrigerate.

Winter Squash Oh, the wonders of winter squash—butternut, buttercup, delicata, and many others—and the way they become sweeter as they age. These sweet beauties with their thick skin are built to last, often up to six months after their autumn harvest. For additional protection with long-term storage, wash your squash to remove all the bacteria on the skin. Then let them dry well for several days.

☞ Store winter squash in a cool, dry, airy space in boxes with space between each squash.



Seasonal Produce Guide

This calendar indicates during which month each food can be harvested locally.

If you have a complete garden, you can grow all these crops.

January

Cooking Greens
Salad Greens
Beets
Carrots

February

Cooking Greens
Salad Greens

March

Asparagus Cooking Greens
Salad Greens

April

Asparagus Beets
Cooking Greens Radishes
Salad Greens

May

Asparagus* Beets* Broccoli
Cooking Greens* Peas
Radishes* Salad Greens*
Spinach* Turnips*
Rhubarb*

June

Beets* Broccoli Cabbage
Carrots* Cooking Greens*
Garlic* Onions* Peas
Radishes* Spinach
Salad Greens* Turnips*
Apricots** Cherries**

July

Beets* Cabbage Carrots*
Corn Cucumber* Green Beans*
Onions* Peppers/Chile*
Potatoes* Radishes*
Summer Squash* Tomatoes*
Plums**

August

Beans, shelling Beets*
Carrots* Corn Cucumber*
Eggplant* Green Bean* Okra*
Onion* Peppers/Chile*
Potatoes* Summer Squash*
Tomatoes* Tomatillos*
Apples** Grapes Melons*
Peaches** Pears** Plums**

September

Beans, shelling Beets* Carrots*
Cooking Greens* Corn Cucumber*
Eggplant* Green Beans* Okra*
Onions* Parsnips Peppers/Chile*
Potatoes* Pumpkins* Salad Greens*
Summer Squash* Tomatoes*
Tomatillos* Winter Squash*
Apples** Grapes Melons*
Pears** Plums**

October

Beans, shelling Beets* Carrots*
Cooking Greens* Eggplant*
Green Beans Onions* Parsnips
Peppers/Chile* Potatoes*
Pumpkins* Salad Greens*
Spinach Tomatoes* Tomatillos*
Winter Squash*
Apples** Melons* Pears**

November

Beets Carrots
Cooking Greens Salad Greens
Apples**

December

Cooking Greens
Salad Greens
Beets
Carrots

*typically available at the Farmers' Market and the Silver City Food Co-op

**often available free for the picking when you ask the owner of a loaded tree

Potatoes Freshly harvested potatoes need to cure out in the air for two weeks while their skins become tough. If you want, you can rub or gently rinse off any dirt. Do not scrub them until you want to eat them. Depending on the type of potato and the storage conditions, potatoes can last up to three months.

☞ Store potatoes after the skins are fully dry and toughened. Place in a box or a bag, in a *dark* place. Potatoes prefer the coolest spot in your home, but not the refrigerator.

Apples Apples store better than any other fruit. Some varieties, usually the ones that ripen last, will keep quite well through the winter. Stored apples will slowly soften, shrivel, and change texture, but usually their sweetness remains. To avoid rot, only store apples that have no blemishes or worm holes.

☞ Store apples in a cool place, with newspaper between layers. Refrigerate apples if possible, since this colder temperature greatly extends their life and crispness.

Carrots, Beets and Turnips These three root crops store for quite a while, but in our climate, they need refrigeration in order to last. If you grow them in your own fall garden, you can mulch the carrots and leave them in the ground long after their tops freeze back.

For best storage, choose crops with unblemished skin and no bug bites. All of these foods prefer to be kept in storage at a constant temperature if possible, avoiding the big temperature swings of the typical New Mexico day. Remember, rot happens, so check your stock regularly, and eat the ones with the little rot spot first!

4 Freezing, Drying, and Canning the Bounty

While the resources listed on the back page of this booklet can teach you all you need to know about food preservation, three methods are briefly introduced here.

Freezing Freezing is the easiest method of food preservation. Even the smallest amounts of food can be quickly processed and put in the

freezer. Try sauteing a batch of local onions, garlic, summer squash, tomatoes, and peppers—eat a little and then freeze the rest in meal-size containers. Or make a pot of local vegetable soup and freeze it for the winter. Freezing allows you to make your own convenience foods. Be creative!

Drying This hot, arid climate often provides perfect weather for sun-drying fruits and vegetables. All you need are a few screens (for example, old window screens) and a light covering to keep off the bugs. If you are new to drying foods, a couple of easy favorites to begin with would be apricots or cherry tomatoes. Slice in half and place on the screen, cut-side up. Ideally, do this early in the morning on a sunny day so the cut side can seal over before evening. After it seals, the fruit can usually dry without concern of molding if the weather turns damp. Dry until leathery.

Canning Canning requires the most specialized equipment and the most specific instructions for safe processing. Refer to a book on canning for the details. Once you are used to canning, it really becomes a pleasant and routine task and is not at all scary or complicated as some people believe. Fruit, tomatoes, and cucumber pickles, which use a water-bath canner, are the best choices for your first ventures into canning.

5 Recognize the Benefits of Local Animal Protein

You can usually buy local beef, pork, and eggs, and sometimes lamb and chickens are available too. Unlike the meat and eggs found in the conventional grocery stores, locally grown meat comes from animals who spend their lives out in the open using their muscles, while feeding in pastures and eating other suitable foods.

Beef Local grass-fed and grass-finished beef means that the cows eat as nature intended, grazing in fields of grasses and alfalfa. Cows are ruminants and naturally eat grass, which humans cannot digest. This works perfectly in the food chain. Grasses, like all plants, take the power of the sun and turn it into chlorophyll. The cows eat these green leaves and turn this food into a high-quality protein that has nurtured humans over the millennia.

Grass-fed, grass-finished cows are never “fattened” on grain, which is hard on their digestion. Many sources believe that when cows eat the diet nature intended, they do not have the detrimental aspects of feedlot beef and actually have many health benefits. Their meat is lean and not marbled with “bad” fats. In addition, pastured animals live a contented life and are often treated with reverence.

Pigs and Chickens Pigs and chickens have more varied diets than cows. Once again, the locally grown difference lies in the fact that they live natural lives out in the open, doing what pigs and chickens do. The yolk of a local egg shows the difference diet makes. Eating all those green growing goodies, the hen produces eggs with yolk that’s orange or deep yellow.

Locally grown meat is more expensive, but when the health benefits are taken into consideration, it might be better to choose the local meat.

6 Begin to Grow Your Own Food

Now might be the time to start growing some of your own food. Beginning with small steps, you can become completely engaged with the taste of really fresh food as well as with the gardening process and animal care.

Sprouts Instead of having traditional salads this winter, begin to grow your own, right in your kitchen. Alfalfa seeds sprout very easily and in only a few days provide a crisp taste treat. Radish, lentil, and clover sprouts are less common but are also quite tasty.

Container Gardening Many people grow food in pots, hence the name. Herbs can easily be grown in containers on your windowsill and will add freshness to any dish. And for your back porch, small cherry tomato varieties grow well in large pots.

Winter Cold Frame A cold frame fits over a growing bed and protects the plants from the cold nights. Compact and easy to manage, it’s a great way to grow cooking and salad greens to feed you all winter. A 4’ × 8’ cold frame provides plenty for two people, can be watered easily, and is free of most insect pests. Designs vary; it may need to be opened and closed daily for ventilation.

A Spring, Summer, and/or Fall Garden A garden doesn't have to last from March to November. You can have either a spring or fall garden for cool-weather crops—greens, beets, carrots, turnips, and peas. Plant early in the spring and harvest in early summer, and/or plant a fall garden in late summer. For hot-weather crops—tomatoes, squash, peppers, cucumbers, green beans, corn, melons and basil—plant a garden in May after all frosts have passed, and enjoy the delicious summer eating season from late July until the first freeze.

Chickens and Goats Even if you live within city limits, you can enjoy fresh eggs by keeping a small chicken coop with a couple of laying hens. If you have the time, space, and commitment, and live outside the city limits, consider keeping a goat for fresh milk and cheese.

Putting It Together: Eating Local All Year

Eat the summer's bounty while the foods are plentiful, freezing and drying a little along the way. Store plenty of squash, potatoes, onions and apples. Learn how to can tomatoes and fruit. Keep a couple of hens for fresh eggs. During the depths of winter, when local food is not available at the market, eat greens from your cold frame and stored foods from your pantry and freezer. *Voilà!* You have local foods on your plate all year long. Congratulations!



I Accept the "Eat Local" Challenge

- Yes! I want to eat more locally grown food.*
- Yes, I will make the commitment to change my eating habits, eat in season, and store food for winter.*

Resources

Local Contacts

About Local Farmers or the Farmers' Market

silvercityfarmersmarket@gmail.com

About Local Food Production, Processing, and Food Issues

The Commons: Center for Food Security
and Sustainability, 388-2988

About Food Processing

Cooperative Extension Service, 388-1559

Books

About Local Eating

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver

Coming Home to Eat by Gary Paul Nabhan

Deep Economy by Bill McKibben

Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan

One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally
by Alison Smith and JB MacKinnon

About Food Processing

Stocking Up (3rd ed.) by Carol Huppig/Rodale Food Center

*Preserving Summer's Bounty: A Quick and Easy Guide to Freezing,
Canning, Preserving and Drying What You Grow*

by Rodale Food Center, edited by Susan McClure

About Gardening and Cold Frames

Four Season Harvest by Eliot Coleman

Growing Food in the Southwest Mountains by Lisa Rayner

About Grassfed Beef

Why Grassfed Is Best by Jo Robinson

A Good Read About an Organic Farmer

Turn Here Sweet Corn by Atina Diffley

This booklet was written locally by Susan Van Auken, a passionate local eater, with hopes that you might take the delightful plunge into eating really fresh foods, growing your own food, and supporting local farmers. Editing by Karen Weller-Watson. Layout by Sarah Johnson. Artwork by Kaweah Yarbrough. All four live in the Gila Valley. Written 2007; revised 2018.