

Daily Union Article
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"Fresh Ideas for Seasonal Shopping"

As our grass, trees, and flowers become more brilliantly green and provide their blooms and fragrances, it's a good time to consider seasonal shopping for fresh fruits and vegetables. Seasonal shopping means that you are purchasing local fruits and vegetables that are more readily available and can be purchased from local producers. Each fruit and vegetable grown in a home or local retail garden reaches its peak at a certain time. Taking advantage of their peak time has many benefits. The color, flavor, texture, and nutritional value increase as it ripens. Food purchased in season tastes better, is good for you, and is generally less expensive.

Buying local produce means you are getting a much fresher product. Whether grown organically or conventionally, produce purchased from our local market travels on average 1,500 miles from the farm to your plate. It has passed hands and touched many surfaces from the field to your grocery store. In most cases, the farther your produce travels the less nutritious it is and you lose some of the flavor, as well. As produce passes peak ripeness, the natural chemicals and nutrients in the product deteriorate. Additionally, even though it seems that we have access to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in the grocery store, their focus is on varieties that travel well and have a stronger shelf life. Because of their limitations, we may not be adding as much variety and color to our plate as we think. Eating a wide variety of colors of fruits and vegetables is an easy way for us to consume a broad variety in nutrients, too!

It is getting easier to pile your plate with seasonal food. You can be intentional about ensuring you are getting fresh, peak time perfect produce. Here are a few ideas on how you can better embrace eating seasonal produce:

Grow a garden. You can't get any fresher produce than stepping out your back door to harvest home grown foods. You don't necessarily need a lot of space to grow your own, nor do you need to have a green thumb. Planting herbs such as basil, mint, parsley, rosemary or oregano in a small porch planter is a great way to add fresh flavor to salads and sauces. The fresh herbs contain more nutrients and disease-fighting compounds than dried herbs that come from a jar. For example, oregano and peppermint are known to lose half their carotenoid (a heart-healthy chemical) when dried, according to a study published in the *Journal of Food Chemistry*.

For our family, gardening is a team effort. My kids may not like heading out to the garden in the heat of summer to hoe, water, and weed but they sure enjoy the fresh flavors of our cucumbers, tomatoes, and sweet corn. Kids are more likely to try new

foods they have had a hand in growing. One of my boys wanted to experiment with a new vegetable last year and found that he really likes eggplant!

Preserve the Harvest. We have a very large garden – approximately 30' x 150'. With a family of five, we use every bit of it but can't use it all at once. We take advantage of our abundance by preserving what we are unable to consume. Adding homegrown stewed tomatoes to my vegetable beef soup on cold winter days or preparing garden sweet corn to go with a meal is what keeps my kids interested in the garden on those hot summer days. If you only have an small herb garden, use a food dehydrator to preserve fresh herbs harvested at their peak. If you don't grow it yourself, take advantage of the spring and summer farmer's markets where you can get some fresh and flavorful produce in abundance. Preserving foods that are in season can save you money by not having to purchase out of season when the produce is more expensive and harder to find. If you are not sure how to preserve produce you have grown or purchased, look for *So Easy to Preserve* from University of Georgia Extension. This resource includes information on all types of food preservation and provides you with the most up-to-date food preservation practices. You can purchase it in book form or use the DVD version to see how each type of preservation is done.

In addition to the many benefits of seasonal shopping already provided, consider the benefits of using foods that have not had preservatives or salt added to them through the manufacturing process. Keeping your meals fresh, colorful, and simple is a great way to boost your health and satisfy your appetite.

Some of the produce that is coming into season in Kansas include, arugula, asparagus, peas, green onions, radishes, rhubarb, salad mix, scallions, and spinach. These can provide a flavorful and nutrient-rich boost to any meal.

Try this tasty spring salad using produce that is coming in season:

Spring Strawberry and Spinach Salad

1 bunch spinach or mixed salad greens

10 large strawberries, sliced

1 small red onion cut into rings

Add-in ideas: Sliced almonds, grilled chilled chicken, sunflower seeds, green onions, grated cheese or a variety of other options that fit your palate!

Dressing

½ cup pineapple juice

2 tablespoons vinegar

1 tablespoon olive oil

1½ teaspoons lemon juice

1½ teaspoons poppy seeds

¼ teaspoon dried basil or 1 tablespoon fresh basil

Serve fresh and enjoy!

For more information and recipe ideas for seasonal foods, stop by the Geary County Extension office to pick up a copy of "Simple Seasonal Meals" (pub. #MF3217) or call me at the office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!