



# THE FARMERS' MARKET COOKBOOK

Foreword by Nigel Slater

**Nina Planck**

Author of *Real Food*  
*What To Eat and Why*

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# The Farmers' Market Cookbook

By Nina Planck

Bestselling author of *Real Food: What to Eat and Why* and *Real Food for Mother and Baby*

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# Foreword by Nigel Slater

I like to know what I'm putting in my mouth. But modern food shopping is a minefield. We have learned the hard way to mistrust factory farming and agribusiness. Food additives confuse us. We are suspicious of the motives of supermarkets. The natural seasons of fruit and vegetables are blurred. Our food is anonymous, its provenance distant, its background mysterious.

Who knew, until the mad cow disease disaster unfolded, that farmers were feeding sheep brains to cattle, turning a natural herbivore into a carnivore? Did anyone tell us that most lettuce has been sprayed a dozen times? Or that the flood of cheap imported plums has nearly wiped out our own orchards, along with countless traditional varieties?

If you are curious about such things, greengrocers and supermarket managers are of little help. Most haven't a clue what variety of peas or carrots they are selling. Potatoes are Jerseys, Cyprus, or Baking. Plums are Spanish, Victoria, or South African. They can't say whether the strawberries were grown outdoors or in poly-tunnels, or what they were sprayed with. They know the green beans are from Zimbabwe – it says so on the box – but little else.

There is a better way to shop. A way that restores not only character but flavor to the food. A way that is a pleasure, rather than a chore. My first trip to a farmers' market was a revelation. The farmer described his apple varieties – when he had picked them, which were at their peak, why I couldn't buy the ones I wanted (they would have a richer flavor if left on the tree a bit longer). Best of all, I sampled all the varieties with a pen knife.

So I was glad when Nina chose my neighbourhood for her farmers' market. When the bell rings at 10 o'clock (okay, so I'm not often there at the bell), I can buy baby greens one hour old, fresh Cromer crab, wild damsons, unfiltered honey, grass-fed lamb, organic eggs. There are strawberries on the plant and Brussels sprouts on the stalk. The food is fresh, seasonal, and locally grown. I can ask all the questions I want. What better way to know what I am putting in my mouth?

**Nigel Slater**

London, August 2000



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# Introduction to the Digital Edition

When I tell people that I created the first farmers' market in London, England, in 1991, they look surprised. Surely such a thing existed in Roman Londinium? Well, yes, certainly there, and in more recent times farmers near what's now Heathrow Airport brought produce to very old trading places such as the famous Covent Garden.

But in modern London—no. There were street markets, and organic markets, and small but growing organic sections in supermarkets. There were lots of radical Green types, and there were terrible, European-wide food scandals (BSE, dioxin in chickens), but the first American-style producers-only farmers' market in the capital (though not in England) was mine.

It's fair to say that the markets were an overnight sensation. Immediately the phone rang with farmers wanting markets and neighborhoods offering spaces. According to *The New Yorker*, the British press dubbed me “The American,” which, if I understand British tone of voice even a tiny bit, I take to be a largely but not entirely friendly moniker.

Never mind the nickname. My little business was and is thoroughly English, entirely homegrown. We soon opened more weekly markets. They thrived and in the next two years markets opened all over England, Scotland, and Wales. Today there are more than five hundred markets in the U.K. and the tradition, now rediscovered, is thriving in cultural and financial terms.

From this adventure, born of my own longing for the markets of my youth, came *The Farmers' Market Cookbook*. In a year of cooking, I borrowed or created, and then cooked and devoured, recipes for all the foods our markets proffered from earth, sea, and sky, whether farmed, hunted, or foraged.

Quite by accident this little book converted me fatefully from an unhealthy and fad-phobic vegetarian who dabbled in fish, to a permanent and enthusiastic omnivore. My gateway food, it turned out, was roast chicken, and the particular gate, chicken skin and The Parson's Nose, as the Brits sometimes call it: that fatty, stubby little tail. Ecstasy was to discover that the fats I feared were, in fact, my salvation. As I ventured, at first gingerly, and then in the style of a charging rhinoceros, into beef, pork, butter, and cheese, I lost weight and cheered up immensely. Honest friends will tell you that I also

became a better cook. Better ingredients will do that.

The recipes are just as I wrote them in 1999. I haven't changed a thing in this edition but my own cooking has certainly evolved. I use more butter and more bone broth, braise more meats. I cook and eat more meat in general. Also, American readers may wonder how big a "knob" of butter is. It's a tablespoon or two; exactly how much is up to you. In the first edition, I recommended using an everyday olive oil for frying and your very best oil for dressing a salad; today I use the best extra-virgin, cold-pressed olive oil for every purpose and every dish. In the fruit and vegetable profiles, I've mentioned many varieties I discovered in England. You might not see them at your local markets, but I've left the names as they are, a snap shot of my London markets in 1999.

My faith in the superior flavor of local produce harvested at its peak and sold in its prime remains. My faith in the farmer's ability to lead us to good food, a belief instilled by my own childhood at Wheatland Vegetable Farms, and rekindled by all the farmers who attend our London markets—and by good farmers everywhere—is as strong as a taproot.

**Nina Planck**  
**New York City**  
**2010**

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# Wheatland, Virginia

*What was paradise, but a garden full of vegetables and herbs and pleasure?  
Nothing there but delights.*

William Lawson, 17th century

I grew up on a 60-acre farm in Wheatland, Virginia. The first summer we farmed, we sold our fruit and vegetables by the side of the road in nearby small towns. We didn't sell much. The following summer, the first farmers' markets opened in Greater Washington D.C., about an hour's drive away. The first time we went to market, in 1980, we picked beets and Swiss chard at six a.m. and turned up an hour late.

We were amazed. It was as if the customers had waited all their lives to buy fresh produce in a parking lot on Saturday morning. Word spread, and the markets grew. Now my parents sell at fifteen farmers' markets a week in peak season. You have to go where the people are.

We could not have made a living farming without farmers' markets. But there is more to markets than money. It is deeply gratifying to sell food you have grown to people who appreciate it. The customers' delight makes all the hoeing, mulching, and picking worthwhile. Going to market with a truck full of produce and coming home with empty baskets is fun, too.

Work or pleasure, farm life revolved around fruit and vegetables. They mark the seasons; May means strawberries, October pumpkins. They set the agenda: when the pepper seedlings got big, it was time to transplant. Naturally produce played a major role in the kitchen. We ate home-grown food at every meal. My father calls it a vegetable-driven existence.

When I was growing up, we started work at six a.m. with the corn pick. We picked in the cold dew because heat quickly turns the sugars in sweetcorn to starch. Besides, dew on corn leaves are like razors. At age ten, I was thrilled to be a corn-picker, because judging ripeness is tricky. If the ear is immature, the kernels are small and insipid. If it is overripe they are tough and starchy. A good corn-picker picks by feel, never opening the husk.





The sky would be brilliant pink as we drove the wagon to the patch and plunged into the cold, wet arches. It was a harsh way to wake up, but after a while I liked being wet to my skin. I carried a tall basket under my left arm and groped for each ear with my right hand. When the ear felt perfect, I snapped it off in one quick motion. Snap, clunk, snap, clunk, snap, clunk, the heavy ears fell into the basket. I bent a green stalk to mark my place, dumped my basket on the wagon, and filled it again. On the way back to the house I was the Corn Queen, bouncing on a load of slippery ears. Now the sun was high, and it drew a strong smell from our clothes. It was sweet, like evaporating corn syrup, and made me hungry. Breakfast was three ears each, boiled for just three minutes, with butter, salt, and pepper.

The squash and cucumber pick was less exciting. It was hot and the stems are spinning. But zucchinis and yellow squashes are beautiful plants. Orange, trumpet-like flowers shudder and buzz. They are full of bees. Squash grows fast in hot weather: one day it's too young, the next it is the right size, and a day later, too big. If you miss a zucchini for several days after its tender prime, it becomes dull and tough – a marrow. We called them zucchini baseball bats and fed them to the cow.

At midday we took a three-hour break. In high summer, Virginia is like a wet sauna. During a heatwave, the sky is white and cloudless. There is no breeze; your skin prickles with sweat. The hours between noon and three o'clock are no time to pick okra, another scratchy plant.

It was time to eat. Lunch was usually tomato sandwiches and leftovers – summer squash and cheese, garlicky green beans, cold peach pie. After lunch we met under the ash tree for more work: hoeing and mulching in June, picking tomatoes, melons, peppers in August. If you were going to market the next day, you would load the truck, bundle basil, write signs. By eight or nine o'clock, depending on the day and season, work was done. Only then did we think about dinner.

The pace of farm life influenced how we ate, and what we believed to be good cooking. Above all, good cooking meant using our own fruit and vegetables. That was easy; we simply ate what was in season, what came back from market, what grew near the house, what was fresh. Sometimes we ate the very first peas or strawberries ourselves. More often we took them to market and waited for the surplus.

Good cooking meant quick, unfussy food with few ingredients and simple flavors. In a restaurant, if I ask my father how he finds the pumpkin risotto, he will often say, "It's nice but I can't taste the pumpkin." I like to taste the undisguised essence of vegetables and fruit. They need very little.

Good cooking meant eating well in two senses: food that was not only healthy but also delicious. It meant using whole, fresh, unsprayed foods as much as possible. It didn't mean fat-free spa menus. Hard work gave us big appetites, and good fats – cold-pressed vegetable oils, real butter, fish oils, grass-fed and pastured meats – are good for you anyway. We liked food you could eat a lot of, every day, and live long and happy. I still cook and eat that way.

When I visit the farm now, I don't work much. I prefer to be in the kitchen. I am struck and awed by the array of fresh fruit and vegetables – nothing there but delights. On the south wall of the kitchen, under the window and out of the sun, are baskets of tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers, sweet and hot. There is a ceramic bowl of home-grown garlic. In the freezer we keep sugared strawberries, whole blueberries, *Garden Salsa* chilies, and Italian frying peppers. Sometimes there are yellow and red bottled tomatoes. We eat them straight from the jar in the winter, with a big bowl of hot popcorn tossed with olive oil and ground cayenne.

The chickens are free to forage on insects and weeds, so our eggs have deep yellow yolks. For years we drank rich milk from our Jersey, Mabel. I hated smelling of cow when I had to milk before school. Eventually we lured Mabel into a truck with a bushel of corn and sold her. It seems sad now.

The real bounty is outside, most of it a short walk from the house. In the dead of winter, we can grow salad leaves in the greenhouse. It takes a few minutes to fill a large bowl. In March, curly spinach planted in September comes back to life. In April and May the greenhouse is filled with annual herbs, including purple, cinnamon, Genovese, Thai, and lemon basil. Sage, thyme, and rosemary grow in the perennial herb garden next to the Little House, our one-room guest house. The rhubarb and asparagus patches are nearby. A handful of pink stalks is enough for a pie, ten green ones for stir-fry.

During strawberry season – just three weeks in May and June – it takes ten minutes to pick two pints for shortcake. From June on, there are more squash and cucumbers than

we can sell, much less eat, and blueberries are ready on the Fourth of July. In mid-July we pull garlic. Before it dries in the barn, 'wet' garlic is mild and sweet, a special treat.

When the tomatoes come in, summer is in full swing. We grow some two dozen different varieties in red, yellow, orange, purple, pink, and green. There are dense plum tomatoes, heavy beefsteaks, tiny cherry tomatoes, and funny-looking heirlooms.

The farm is at its best on Friday nights, when we load six or seven trucks for four Saturday markets. The basement, the converted greenhouse, the shady place under the trees, and the barn are overflowing with freshly picked produce. There are red, yellow and orange bell peppers; yellow, purple, and green beans; cantaloupes and watermelon; mustard and rape greens; tomatoes and eggplant; and various smaller crops – chilies, okra, basil, beets, chard, garlic, raspberries. A master chart shows what goes to which market. *Arlington*, it might say: *29 half bushels of tomatoes: 13 Lady Lucks, 5 Pink Girls, Lemon Boys, 2 Brandywines, 4 Pineapples.* From the kitchen, I can hear the trucks being loaded and people calling out what goes where. By nine o'clock, the trucks are lined up in the driveway, ready for market. They leave at five in the morning.

Farming is hard work, but when we sit down to dinner we feel lucky. When everyone has had a bath, I set the table on the porch and open a bottle of Gamay from our friend's vineyard across the way. We start with a plate of sliced tomatoes or a bowl of salsa. There are always two or three vegetables, and dessert is fruit pie. The moon rises over the porch and the crickets chirp. It is still warm at eleven o'clock. My mother sighs – her way of saying, *This is luxury.* We all think so.

**Nina Planck**  
London, 1999

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# The Farmers' Market



In London I found myself homesick, not for the farm where I grew up, but for fresh seasonal produce. My garden was tiny. I didn't have a car to drive to pick-your-own places and farm shops. I had tried organic produce deliveries called box schemes: they were expensive, and too often the produce was the worse for wear and imported. I didn't want to eat Israeli tomatoes in January, even if they were organic – they had travelled too far and didn't taste good. Even when my delivery contained British produce, it came from the middle-man, not the farmer.

I knew what I wanted. I wanted fresh English food in season, straight from the farmer. I wanted to learn from farmers about the growing season and good varieties. I wanted ripe tomatoes in August, traditional apples, local asparagus, fresh sweetcorn, and delicious strawberries. I decided to start a weekly farmers' market, exclusively for farmers selling home-grown produce.

I rented a site and set about finding farmers. It was slow going. No one knew about farmers' markets. "Our members wouldn't be interested," said the National Farmers' Union. With falling farm prices and income, this seemed a blinkered view. (Today the NFU supports farmers' markets.) Eventually I found producers selling fruit and vegetable pork, chicken, goat's cheese, eggs, honey, breads, flowers, herbs, wines, and juice. All the farms were within a hundred miles of the market, many closer. Some were organic.

The Islington Farmers' Market was the first in London. When Agriculture Minister Nick Brown rang the opening bell on Sunday, 6 June 1999, people were fighting to get to the salad leaves. They were like locusts. In four hours, nothing was left. I bought the last carrot. Three months later I opened two more weekly markets, in Notting Hill and Swiss Cottage, and within six months I had quit my job at the American embassy to start farmers' markets full-time. In 2000 we organized seven weekly markets in London. Markets were appearing all over the country. In 2013, there were more than 500 markets in Britain, and my own little company, with some two dozen popular markets, was still the leading market organizer in London.

In one sense, farmers' markets are not new. Farmers have been selling produce in market towns since Roman days. Only a generation ago, local market gardeners supplied London greengrocers. We ate strawberries at Wimbledon and Russet apples in October. But global agriculture trade changed all that. Now supermarkets sell everything, all year round. Farmers' markets restore something lost, but not forgotten – contact with the seasons.

## **WHAT IS FOR SALE AT THE FARMERS' MARKET?**

The farmers' market is at once a greengrocer, butcher, baker, deli, florist, garden center, and fishmonger. Along with fruit, vegetables, and salads, farmers sell lamb, beef, pork, chicken, venison, cheese, eggs, honey, wine, juice, mushrooms, jams, jellies, chutneys, baked goods, plants, cut flowers, and herbs. There are homemade meat pies, quiches, smoked chicken and fish, flavored sausages and pâtés.

There are native foods like watercress, as well as locally grown imports, like fennel and wild arugula. There are traditional, or heirloom, varieties of fruits and vegetables and the meat of rare-breed animals. There are unusual things, like striped beets, golden zucchinis, giant ostrich eggs, unfiltered honey, and bee pollen.

There are wild-caught foods, including game, mussels, lobster, and crab. Farmers gather sloes for gin, damsons, blackberries, mushrooms, and elderflowers from the wild. In December they sell Christmas puddings, bronze turkeys, geese, goose dripping



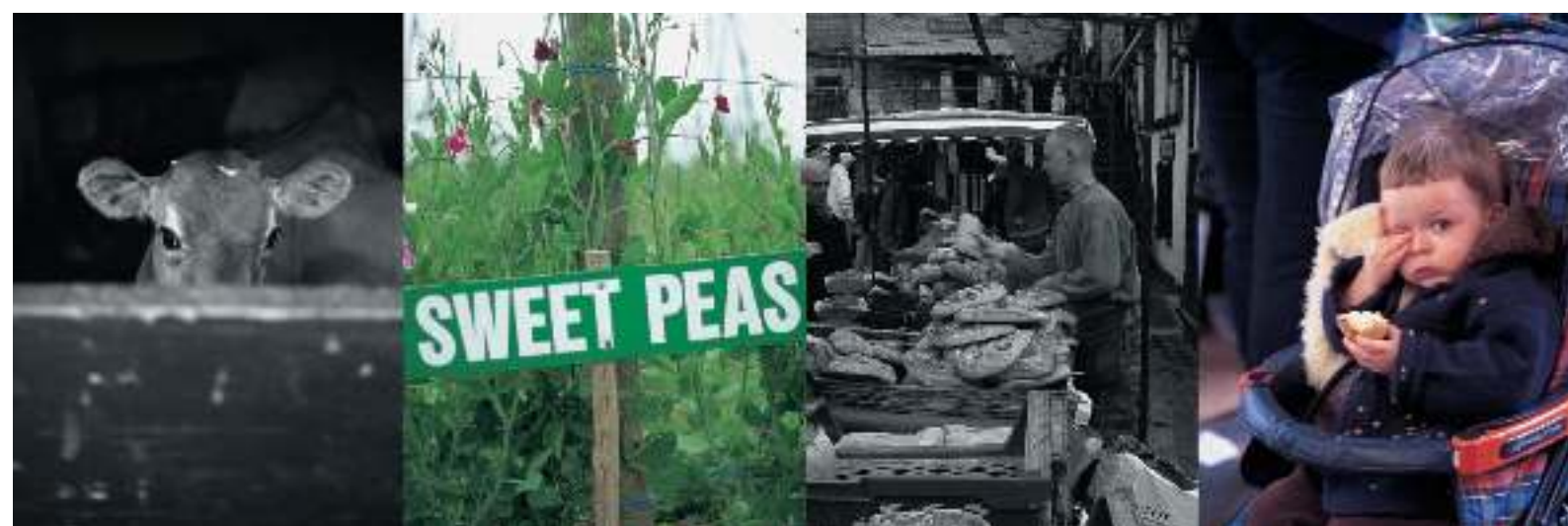
mistletoe, and Christmas trees.

If you don't know what it is or how to cook it, just ask. The lamb lady sells rosemary and gives out recipes. The bee-keeper brings bees to market and explains why raw local honey is good for allergies. You may learn how to use wild garlic, what free-range means, or the difference between a green and a red pepper. (The red one is ripe.)

## HOW GREEN IS MODERN AGRICULTURE?

Most commercial growers routinely use toxic chemicals. Unacceptable levels of organophosphates, DDT, and other chemicals, some of them illegal in the UK, have been found on supermarket produce. In 1999, when I opened the first farmer's market in London, the typical head of British lettuce received eleven pesticide treatments; 99 percent of eating pears are treated with fungicides, 91 percent with growth promoters. Nitrogen and phosphorus run-off from overuse of fertilisers pollutes rivers and harms wildlife.

Driven to get higher yields at lower cost, meat, dairy, and egg producers use even more antibiotics, growth promoters, and hormones. They use low-quality, cheap feed, such as scrapie-infected sheep brains, which led to the BSE crisis. Animals suffer from overcrowding and lack of room to roam. The result is high infection and disease rates, which are then treated with more chemicals. On fish farms, dirty water and small pens cause sea lice infestation, which is doused with pesticides. These practices do nothing for the flavor and quality of the food.



The apologists for chemically intensive agriculture say they merely want to produce cheaper food for the public. But the public pays the final bill. The prices farmers receive are declining and the consumer gets low-quality food. Human health and the

environment suffer.

Many farmers reject these chemically intensive methods as harmful and counterproductive. They employ various alternatives, some traditional, others cutting edge. Instead of using chemical fertilisers, they build soil fertility with leguminous crops and composted animal manure. Instead of pesticides that harm songbirds and damage human health, they use row covers, companion planting, and beneficial insects. Instead of fumigants to kill soil-borne diseases, they use crop rotation. Instead of herbicides that reduce biodiversity, they keep weeds down by mechanical means and mulch. They feed livestock a traditional diet of grass and forage instead of the ruminant equivalent of junk food. Instead of dosing animals with antibiotics, they use homeopathic remedies and allow animals more room, so disease is less likely to spread.

These methods protect humans and the environment from poisonous chemicals. Another reason to farm green is nutritional. A small but growing set of data suggests that produce grown in chemical-free, sustainable ways is nutritionally superior, with more vitamins, minerals, trace elements, protein, and anti-oxidants.

Of all the farmers using these green methods, organic farmers are the best known. In the U.K., they can be certified by an authority such as the Soil Association, which conducts regular inspections to ensure organic methods are used. In the U.S., the federal organic standards have pushed many large producers in a greener direction, but the foods smaller farmers sell at markets often exceed those standards in important ways. Biodynamic growing pre-dates organic farming and is sometimes referred to as organic plus. Biodynamic farmers use organic methods as well as astronomy-based planting calendars, unique fertilizers, and crop rotations to improve yields and nutritional value. Demeter is the main biodynamic certifying authority in the U.S. and U.K. Any farmer in the market claiming to be organic or biodynamic should display the appropriate certificate.

Many farmers at farmers' markets use some or all of these methods, but their produce does not fit any of the established labels. On these farms, the apples are unsprayed, the lamb is additive-free, the chickens roam freely on untreated pasture. Before organic became a fashionable term and a legal definition, many farmers ran chemical-free, natural farms. Many still do.

On our farm, we always grew most crops without herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides. Now we use none at all. We have always fed our soil and plants with composted manure, leguminous crops, and a sea water-based nutritional supplement rich in trace elements. We mulch and hand-weed to control weeds and use natural remedies for the few pests we have. The sea water solution cannot be certified organic.

is, however, healthy for plants, people and the planet. Our soil is rich and crumbly, our plants thrive, and our fruit and vegetables taste great.

Only certified farms may label their produce 'organic' or 'biodynamic'. But the wise green consumer should look beyond the label for healthy food and farming methods. At the market you can develop a rapport with the farmers. They should want to earn your trust, and to win your business, they will respond to your requests.

### **WHICH TOMATO? GROWN WHERE?**

Does organic food taste better? Sometimes. The three most important factors for flavor are proper maturity and ripeness, freshness, and a good-tasting variety. Much imported organic fruit is grown for the same shipping qualities as other mass-produced fruit: it is hard, thick-skinned, and tolerates mechanical harvesting. Even organic produce can be picked green, stored too long, and ripened artificially. The farm may not pollute the rivers, but the tomatoes are tasteless. Farmers who care about taste grow varieties with superior flavor, pick them at the right time, and sell them fresh. When I hear someone say, "We buy organic tomatoes because they taste better," I always think, Which tomato? Grown where?

### **WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY?**

Biodiversity can refer to many species living in one eco-system, or multiple varieties of one plant or animal. Biodiversity increases food security and preserves valuable traits. Chemically intensive farming favors mono-cropping, but single crops are more vulnerable to frost, pests, or disease. The Irish potato famine is a famous example. Over-reliance on one variety can also reduce biodiversity further down the line. Cox apples, for example, are particularly vulnerable to pests, so farmers use more insecticides, which kill beneficial insects and reduce the food supply of songbirds. It is a downward spiral: fewer apple varieties, fewer insects, fewer songbirds.

When varieties are lost, valuable traits are lost too. Sturmer apples contain 200 milligrams Vitamin C per 100 grams, five times greater than Golden Delicious with 40 milligrams. But few people know Sturmers, because 70 percent of the eating apples in the UK are Cox and Bramley. Rare-breed animals, many of which are near extinction, often have better flavor, and can be hardier than their intensively bred cousins. The British Saddleback pig, for example, forages better. The same might be said of commercial (or industrial) vs. traditional breeds and varieties in every country in the world.



Why is there more variety at farmers' markets? Farmers selling directly to the consumer seek different qualities from the big growers, distributors, and retailers, so they grow forgotten varieties and breeds. They want nice texture, for example, rather than shelf-life, nutritional value rather than heavy cropping, flavorsome meat rather than docile animals. Growing and rearing different varieties and breeds is fun, too. Who wants to plant, pick, sell, and eat the same plum for twenty years?

## EAT FOODS IN PEAK SEASON

Produce tastes best when it is in season and locally grown – exactly what the farmer's market offers. At the market there are no strawberries in January. But techniques such as poly-tunnels, long-season varieties and improved storage conditions have stretched even local growing seasons. For the very best flavor, eat produce at peak season – the plant's natural peak, when it is cropping heavily outdoors.

Why buy in peak season? A common side effect of breeding plants for extended seasons is loss of other qualities, such as flavor. Peak season produce is more likely to be of a traditional variety, with outstanding flavor or texture. Peak season produce is less likely to have been stored a long time, losing nutrients and flavor. Stored produce is often treated with waxes, preservatives, and fungicides.

Produce in peak season is more likely to be grown outdoors in real soil, rather than under glass, in sterile soil substitutes (substrate), or in a water bath with liquid fertilizer (hydroponically). English cucumbers and zucchinis in May, for example, must be grown under glass. Fruit and vegetables grown in open sun and soil taste better and are more nutritious. Soil minerals, which vary from farm to farm, impart specific flavors and nutrients. This is the French *terroir*, the idea that the distinctive features of a small piece of land – soil type, moisture, frost, wind patterns – impart special character to the grapes and thus the wine. *Terroir* is even at work in cheese and meat. Have you ever wondered why all supermarket vegetables taste alike, or why the potted herbs in substrate are insipid and die in three days? They have no *terroir*.

One season-extending technology widely used by farmers, including 'green' farmers, is the poly-tunnel. A piece of plastic stretched over the plants like a gardener's cloche, traps the sun and warms the soil, which adds a few extra weeks at the beginning and end of the season. The season for strawberries, asparagus, and rhubarb is often extended with poly-tunnels. Mediterranean crops like tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers often need poly-tunnels all summer in our climate. If they are good varieties grown in healthy soil they should be tasty.

## GROWING IT ALL BACK HOME:

### A Complete Revolution in British Cookery

Cookery writers try to define native cooking, but it is an elusive concept. Like culture, food is never static, but constantly subject to new influences. In the 1950s, Elizabeth David introduced Mediterranean flavors to Britain. Now olive oil, basil, and garlic are basics in most kitchens. Asian and West Indian immigrants have brought spices into mainstream meals. Curry has long been part of British cookery. With each new ingredient and method, the repertoire of the native cook grows.

Until recently, traditional British cookery was unfashionable. Then food writers like Jane and Sophie Grigson, Henrietta Green, Sybil Kapoor, and Nigel Slater redeemed native dishes and ingredients with style and affection. In her wonderful book *Simple British*, Sybil Kapoor returns to quintessentially British ingredients to define native cooking. Elderflower, oats, haddock, greengages, and lamb remind us of Britain, she says, just as basil, tomatoes, buffalo mozzarella, and arugula suggest Italy.



The British palate has come to appreciate many new vegetables, from fennel to Tuscan kale to arugula. But for a long time such ingredients were imported, expensive, and hard to find. We ate them in chic restaurants or found them in specialty shops. Today these once-exotic crops are grown right here at home. Alongside native damson, Egremont Russets, and watercress at the farmers' market are many ingredients one might still think of as foreign: fennel, fresh buffalo cheese, arugula, chilies, basil, Tuscan or black kale.

With the spread of farmers' markets, the cooking revolution has moved from the cookbook and the kitchen to the countryside. For introducing us to new ingredients, we must thank the cookery writers and chefs. For growing these crops and bringing them to

market, we are indebted to farmers all over Britain.

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For a list of local food sources see [Where I Buy Real Food](#).

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# How to Use this Book

Fruit and vegetables are arranged alphabetically, roughly by type and family, but also by how they are used in the kitchen. Pumpkins and winter squash, for example, form one section. They are in the same family and they can be substituted for each other in most recipes. Onions and shallots share a section, but their fellow allium, the leek, has its own.

Each section gives basic information about a fruit or vegetable, including its season when it is ripe, and how to keep it. 'Making the most of a surplus' tells you what to do when you have more perishable produce than you can eat.

Instead of starting with a recipe, simply buy what looks nice at the farmers' market, supermarket, or wherever you shop for fresh produce. Then read about the fruit or vegetable. Perhaps you will learn a basic recipe (polenta or pizza), discover a new method (smashing garlic), or get an idea (fava bean paste).

As you cook, make substitutions and alter quantities to taste. The recipes are simple and forgiving. They are meant to be eaten at home, not in a restaurant. No recipe is immutable, anyway: it is merely a record of a meal someone somewhere enjoyed once. I think healthy eating is important, but the recipes are not low-fat. Nor are they rich. They suit me, but if your tastes lean in either direction, adjust them.

My cooking philosophy is best expressed in the recipes, but here are some maxims.

- *Ignore fashion.* If you don't like balsamic vinegar, don't use it.
- *Forget what's 'authentic'.* I used to run out of stock when making risotto. Finally I realised that I like it creamy – soft, even – not *al dente*, as it is meant to be. Now I use more stock. You don't serve the recipe. It serves you.
- *Keep it simple.* Let one ingredient star, or stick to unbeatable pairings like tomato and basil.
- *Be inventive.* I adore our family recipe for cucumber salad. I have chopped it up to make salsa (though it is not Mexican) and puréed it for gazpacho (though it is not Spanish).

I hope the book makes you a more adventurous, confident, and independent cook. If you were to buy Jerusalem artichokes at the farmers' market, read about them here, try one recipe, tweak it to suit, discover you love Jerusalem artichokes, and never use the recipe again, this book would be a success. Cooking without lists, without recipes, without scales and measures, is one of life's great pleasures. Eating food the way you like

it is another. Please yourself.

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## SERVINGS

On the assumption, by this single and childless writer, that many of us cook regularly for a few people, many recipes serve two or four. ‘Serves 2 to 4’ means the recipe makes two servings if it is the only vegetable you are eating, or four if you are eating other vegetables.

## INGREDIENTS

*Parsley* means the flat-leafed kind. *Sugar* is caster sugar. Some recipes call for vanilla pods, which are lovely, but not cheap. One teaspoon of real vanilla extract is usually a good substitute. *Vanilla Sugar* makes the pod go further. Split a pod and keep it in a jar of sugar. It keeps for months. *Cayenne*, *serrano*, or *jalapeño* peppers will usually do for fresh chilis, but if the variety of pepper matters it is specified. *Pepper* means freshly ground black peppercorns. *Mustard seed*, yellow or brown, is a wonderful spice, cheap and easy to find.

*Salt* means any sea salt, rich in trace elements and iodine, an essential nutrient. It matters whether you use flakes or rock salt, the recipe says so.

A word about salt in cooking. Sodium is an essential nutrient, but processed foods contain far too much – an attempt to compensate for lack of flavor and freshness. But fresh, whole foods need salt, too. Starchy vegetables and grains don’t taste right if they are not salted during cooking. Salt enhances flavor, even making sweet things taste sweeter. Mind the salt in stocks, especially store-bought, or you will over-salt the finished dish.

Buy locally produced untreated *honey*. Commercial honey is filtered, blended, and cooked. This process destroys flavor, as well as trace elements and pollen, which can relieve allergies. Raw honey has the distinctive taste of local, seasonal flowers. Gardeners rely on bees for pollination – another reason to buy local honey.

The original recipes call for “oil for frying” and “your best olive oil.” Today I don’t distinguish between cooking and dressing; I use the best extra-virgin, cold-pressed olive oil I can find and afford for everything from sautéing to dressing cold salads. I don’t use any vegetable oils made from grain or seeds, such as corn, canola, soy, or safflower.

Some processed foods are cheap, nutritious, tasty, and just what a busy cook needs. Canned tomatoes, including passata (see Basic Recipes) are essential. Dried chick peas

and cannellini beans take hours to cook; I use canned. To deepen their flavor, cook them in their stock with sautéed garlic or herbs. I do make my own stock (see Basic Recipes) but store-bought is handy. I use an organic one, Kallo, in many flavors.

Most importantly, a note on the main ingredients – fruit and vegetables. Variety names such as *Opal* (a zucchini) are in italics. I hope this encourages cooks to seek out superior varieties, and farmers to grow them.

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# APPLES



There are some seven thousand apple varieties, but only about a hundred are grown commercially. Britain is ideal apple country. Sadly, more than 60 per cent of its apple orchards have vanished since 1970. Just two varieties – Cox and Bramley – account for 70 per cent of the apples we eat in Britain. Instead of stocking other native varieties, the supermarkets are overflowing with New Zealand Galas, French Braeburns and American Red Delicious.

At the farmers' market there are English Braeburns, Galas, and Red Delicious, not to mention Discovery, Worcester Pearmain, Blenheim Orange, Laxton Superb, Jupiter, Spartan, Winston. Some farmers grow more than a hundred varieties. One of the best reasons to buy local produce is learning about forgotten fruit.

The way to learn apple season is by eating them, but a rough guide helps. Discoveries arrive first, as early as August. In late August and September, Katy, Worcester Pearmain

Greensleeves, and James Grieve arrive. Spartan, Cox's Orange Pippin, and Egremont Russet come in late September and October.

Farmers bring selected apples from controlled-atmosphere storage through winter and spring. Crowngolds and Jonagoreds, two red-yellow large, juicy eating apples, may be crisp in May. Ida Red and Red Pippin are good keepers. In general, a smaller apple stored better.

Unlike pears, which must be picked underripe, apples should ripen on the tree. Supermarket Russets are seldom ripe. The skin and flesh are greenish. They taste sharp, not nutty.

Cooking apples are tart, acidic, and collapse like cotton wool when cooked. Bramley is the classic. Howgate Wonder and Lord Derby are others. Blenheim Orange is a 'sweet cooker'. Dessert or eating apples are sweeter and hold their shape in tarts and pies. Winston are sharp and crisp. Try tasting single-variety juices to learn about flavours.

After giving up using chemicals, organic growers say their fruit is denser with more flavour. Ninety percent of the organic apples in the UK are imported. If you find organic orchards or those using fewer chemicals, support them.

## **SEASON**

First appear in August, peak in October. Excellent fruit from storage until February. Quality waning by April.

## **WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

No bruises or breaks in the skin. Rough, russeted patches are fine, even desirable. Heavy fruit. Ask if apples have been sprayed, when, and how often.

## **STORAGE**

A cool place, not the fridge, for several weeks in peak season, less in the spring. Never with other vegetables. The ethylene released by apples causes green vegetables to spoil faster and makes carrots bitter.

## **MAKING THE MOST OF A SURPLUS**

Apple sauce is easy to make and keeps well.

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## **CHARLOTTE'S EASY BRAMLEY SPONGE CAKE WITH CUSTARD**

'Bramley – still the best for cooking'. So reads the sign at the Deme's stall on the farmer



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