

Lincoln County Homemakers' News and Clues

August ~ 2008

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To Market, to Market, to the Farmers Market we go!

During August, we will celebrate *Farmers Market Week*. Farmers markets are ancient methods used by farmers worldwide to sell their produce directly to consumers.

Direct marketing of farm products through farmers markets continues to be an important sales outlet today for agricultural producers nationwide. According to the USDA, in fiscal year 2005, fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally-grown fruits, vegetables and herbs were available from 14,600 farmers. These locally-grown food products were sold at 2,600 farmers markets as well as 2,000 roadside stands and through 237 community-supported agriculture programs.



The big six reasons to eat locally ~

#1 *Quality*: Locally-grown product is usually picked at peak ripeness and is available within 24 – 48 hours of harvest. This means fresher, tastier and nutritionally-better fruits and vegetables. A recent review of nutritional comparisons of fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables looked at the percent of loss of vitamin C when processed from fresh to frozen and from fresh to canned. The studies showed a loss of vitamin C from 13 percent up to 90 percent. These studies used “fresh” fruits and vegetables purchased from grocery stores, where there was no way to know how long before peak they were picked or how long they sat in storage before purchase. Because many vitamins and minerals in foods begin to degrade immediately following harvest, it would stand to reason that the fresher the food, the more nutrients it would retain.

#2 *Health*: Chronic disease such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers are related to poor diet and lack of physical activity. Eating locally-grown fruits and vegetables fights chronic disease.

#3 *Safety*: Food safety: foods brought in from other countries as well as foods here at home are at risk for foodborne pathogens and contamination. Many foods are never inspected. Knowing where your food is grown can mean a safer food supply.

#4 *Environmental*: Food from around the world that is transported into our local grocery stores contributes to air, water and land pollution.

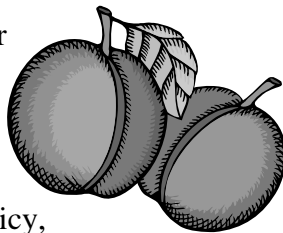
#5 *Economy*: Buying from a local farmers market or produce stand puts money back into the local economy. The average American farmer receives 20 cents of each dollar spent on food. The rest goes to middlemen for packing, shipping, handling, and marketing. Farmers who sell direct to consumers receive full retail value of the food—a dollar for a dollar spent. The local food economy gains \$3 for each dollar spent when shoppers choose to buy locally because farmers put their money back into the local economy.

#6 *Trust*: There is comfort in knowing where and from whom your food originates.

For more farmers market information, you can call the Farmers Market Hotline at 1-800-384-8704.

Peaches ~ A Sure Sign of Summertime!

A sure sign that summer has sprung is the arrival of peaches at roadside stands and farmers markets. The fuzzy peach is most closely identified with the south. Its juicy, sweet, fragrant flesh is a favorite in cobblers, pies, jams and other desserts. My favorite, however, is just eaten out of hand. Wash and eat.



Bursting with natural sweetness and unmistakable perfume, the rosy-skinned peach often claims a special place in childhood memories and traditions. Maybe you remember picking peaches, or the wonderful taste and aroma of that peach cobbler piping hot from the oven.

Lucky for us, fresh peaches are usually available beginning in July through August. You'll find the tastiest fruits at local farmers markets, roadside stands and U-pick farms. Many times, those purchased at supermarkets may not be as tasty, due to the fact that they are often picked too soon. Local peaches are picked at their peak of sweetness.

Peaches are classified as either clingstone or freestone. The fruit is easily separated from the stone, or pit, in freestone varieties, making them a favorite for those eaten out of hand. In clingstones, the flesh adheres tightly to the pit. These are normally used for processing and preserving into jams, jellies and preserves to ensure yearlong availability, convenience and nutrition.

When choosing peaches, look for those that are yellow or creamy in color. The amount of rosy "blush" on the surface is characteristic of the variety, not ripeness. Remember that peaches bruise easily, so handle them carefully.

To test them for ripeness, press the fruit gently between your finger and thumb. The fruit should feel firm, but have a little give. Most will have a sweet fragrance. Avoid peaches that are too soft. These are often overripe and will spoil quickly.

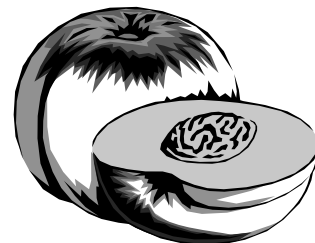
Peaches that are very firm may be stored on the kitchen counter for two to four days to finish ripening. Once ripe, refrigerate and eat within three to four days. Ripe peaches should be refrigerated in a single layer to prevent bruising and spoilage.

Fresh peaches make wonderful cobblers and pies. The easiest way to remove the skin is to dip the peach in boiling water for 20 to 30 seconds. Immediately dip into cold water, and the skin will slip right off. Riper peaches need less scalding time to loosen the peels.

When using peeled peaches, remember that peaches brown rapidly when exposed to air. To prevent this, soak halves or slices for five minutes in one quart of water with three tablespoons of lemon juice and two crushed 500-milligram vitamin C tablets.

One medium fresh peach contains only 47 calories, which might seem surprising, given its fresh taste. If eaten with the skin on, peaches have 1.9 grams of fiber, 10 percent vitamin C and five percent vitamin A.

Peaches are very versatile and can be used for breakfast by tossing them in brown sugar and then adding them to the top of waffles and pancakes. Add them sliced to cereals, both hot and cold; make smoothies with them, or for a special treat, add puréed peaches to homemade ice cream.



Sincerely,

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