

Ask an Expert – Six Tips for Planning Menus around Farmers Market Selections

Heidi LeBlanc

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Farmers markets are known for offering an ever-changing variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Although variety is a benefit of shopping at local farmers markets, it can be difficult and overwhelming to come up with a menu for the week without knowing what will be available at the market. Being flexible allows you to choose the produce that looks the best and is offered at the best price. Below are tips for planning meals around the unpredictable availability at farmers market.

1. Reverse your menu planning schedule. Shop at the market first, then build a menu for the week based on what you purchased. This will ensure that you use what you bought, which will reduce food waste.
2. Plan the non-vegetable portion of your meals, then add the vegetable part after seeing what looks best at the market.
3. Have a general sense of when different fruits and vegetables are usually in season and available. Plan your menu with at least two options, then buy the one that is offered at the best price.
4. Bring your menu to the market. If there is something that looks great, but isn't in your plan, revise your menu on the spot to incorporate it.
5. Include a few meals in your menu that use a variety of produce such as stir-fry, soup or omelets.
6. Be open to making last-minute substitutions to your favorite recipe. Consider these fruits and vegetables that work well as substitutions for each other.

Recipe calls for	Try this instead
Apples	Pears, grapes, cherries
Beets	Radishes, turnips, rutabaga, potatoes
Blueberries	Strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, pitted cherries
Broccoli	Cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts
Cucumbers	Zucchini, celery
Zucchini	Yellow squash, patty pan squash, eggplant
Potatoes	Carrots, sweet potatoes, beets, rutabaga, turnips
Spinach	Kale, Swiss chard, bok choy
Onions	Shallots, leeks, scallions
Peaches	Nectarines, plums, pears

By: Heidi LeBlanc, Utah State University Extension Create Better Health director, Heidi.leblanc@usu.edu and Casey Coombs, Create Better Health assistant director, casey.coombs@usu.edu