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A Consumer's Guide to Safe Handling of Locally Grown Produce

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Why Buy Locally Grown Produce

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet, and Arkansas has plenty to offer. Buying produce that is grown either near you or somewhere in Arkansas has many benefits.

- Produce picked at or near peak ripeness is packed with nutrients and flavor. Vitamins, minerals, fiber and other natural substances will help protect you against chronic diseases.
- Buying locally grown produce supports local farms and keeps money circulating in your community.
- Local food travels a short distance to your plate, so energy costs for transportation are minimized.

Where to Buy Locally Grown Produce

A wide variety of produce is grown in Arkansas, and the **Arkansas Grown®** trademark will help you spot it in retail outlets. If you see the trademark, you can be sure the food was grown or produced in Arkansas. Go to http://www.arkansasgrown.org to learn more.

Arkansas Fruit and Vegetable Harvest Calendar*

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Apples				■	■	■	■
Blackberries			■	■			
Blackeyed peas			■	■	■	■	■
Blueberries			■	■			
Cantaloupes				■	■	■	■
Corn, sweet			■	■	■		
Cucumbers		■	■	■	■	■	
Grapes					■	■	
Green beans		■	■	■	■	■	■
Lettuce	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Nectarines			■	■	■		
Okra			■	■	■	■	
Peaches			■	■	■	■	
Peppers			■	■	■	■	■
Plums			■	■			
Strawberries	■	■	■				
Squash, summer		■	■	■	■	■	
Squash, winter				■	■	■	■
Sweet potatoes					■	■	■
Tomatoes			■	■	■	■	
Turnips		■	■	■	■	■	■
Watermelon				■	■	■	■

*Source: Arkansas Farmers' Market Association, www.uark.edu/afma.

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Visit a farmers' market and get to know the farmers in your community. You can buy produce directly from farmers, and you can talk with them to get recipes and serving suggestions. Go to the Arkansas Farmers' Market Association web site (www.uark.edu/afma) to find a market near you, or contact your county Extension agent. Ask about U-pick or pick-your-own farms and start picking your own fruits right from the tree or bush.

You can find locally grown produce most of the year. Use the Arkansas Fruit and Vegetable Harvest Calendar to find out when produce is in season.

How to Prepare and Store Locally Grown Produce Safely

No matter where you get it, you need to handle produce safely to prevent foodborne illness. Disease-causing organisms can be present on raw produce from contact with soil, equipment or food handlers. Follow these tips to keep it safe.

At the market:

- Choose produce that has good color and texture. Vegetables should be firm and crisp. Fruits should have a sweet smell.

- Do not buy produce that has brown or black spots as this could be a sign of bruising or insects.

At the farm:

- Wash your hands before picking produce and after handling other materials.
- Do not collect produce that has fallen on the ground.
- Place produce in clean containers.
- Keep the produce in a cooler with ice packs to transport it home.

At home:

- Put produce that needs refrigeration away promptly. Store it in a clean refrigerator at 40°F or below. Use a refrigerator thermometer to control the temperature.
- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables with cool tap water immediately before eating. Do not use soap or detergents. Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. Cut away any bruised or damaged areas before eating.

- If produce is peeled and/or cut, refrigerate within two hours. Leftover cut produce should be discarded if left at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Wash hands with hot, soapy water before and after handling fresh produce or raw meat, poultry or seafood as well as after using the bathroom, changing diapers or handling pets.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with hot, soapy water after they have come in contact with fresh produce, raw meat, poultry or seafood. Sanitize after washing with a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water.
- If possible, use one clean cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood.

References

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