

On Whidbey Island, winter fare is there for the taking

By Kelsi Franzen – Marketing, Education, and Outreach Coordinator for Whidbey Island Conservation District



Cool pockets of air nestle themselves among contours of the landscape. Light wanes. Colors so vibrant from summer are now fading into deep orange and brown, pale green and gray. To our land, and to those whose livelihoods depend upon it, a period of rest, of repose, draws near. With each passing day, winter is welcomed on Whidbey Island.

For the lovers of Whidbey fare, the cool weather season provides an opportunity for consumers to deepen relationships with local farmers. As main season growing subsides to more challenging conditions, a quick chat with your farmer provides both the knowledge of what is available and a glimpse into what it means to grow locally year-round.

In the Pacific Northwest, as each season changes, so do the variables that influence our food. Winter is often laden with frost, heavy rains, and lack of light – major contributors to dormancy in plants, both wild and domestic. As petals curl and leaves shed, a plant's energy becomes centered in its roots below, preparing for the rough months ahead.

Admire all the change, on Whidbey one can still find delicious food nestled in the landscape this winter. Root vegetables, for example, which include a wide variety of carrots and beets, radishes and turnips, rutabagas, Jerusalem artichokes, and leeks, store well in the ground, an earthen refrigerator until the hard frost arrives.

Overwintering Brassicas – brussels sprouts, broccoli, kale, cabbage, collards, cauliflower, and even giant kohlrabi – are picked well into mid-winter. Storage crops like potatoes, dry beans, onions, garlic, and winter squash lay in waiting for your purchase in barns and farm stands. A quick phone call or email, a visit to a farmer's website or Facebook page, can connect you directly with local food *right now* in our cool weather season.

What winter fare can be found on Whidbey? There are many resources available to connect you with local food. A few tips – keep your eyes open for road side and farm stands, look for “local” on grocery store labels, visit a winter farmers market, join a cool season CSA, or sign-up through a variety of farm mailing lists to stay “in-the-know” on what produce is available and where to find it.

How should you start? A variety of organizations that support local producers have developed informational brochures and websites to help you in your search for local fare. Below is a list of several tools available to you – but even more exists out there! A bit of research and creativity can point you in the right direction on Whidbey and connect you with the farms and food that you love.

Helpful Resources to Get You Started

- **Goosefoot's 2016 Farm Stands brochure**
<http://www.goosefoot.org/pdf/farmstands.pdf>
A great directory for locating a farm stand near you. Contact Marian at marian@goosefoot.org if you wish to be added to this brochure. Farm stands open this season, but not featured on the brochure include Bell's Farm and Foxtail Farm.
- **Slow Food Whidbey Island's Directory of Farm Stands, Farmers Markets, and CSA Programs**
<http://www.slowfoodwhidbeyisland.org/csa/>
A great complement to Goosefoot's directory, and includes farmers market and CSA information, as well.
- **Whidbey and Camano Island Tourism's Farmers Market Map**
<http://whidbeycamanoislands.com/things-to-do/food-wine/farmers-markets/>
A map that features the hours of Whidbey and Camano Island's farmers markets.
- **Whidbey Island Conservation District's Local Agriculture Resource Page**
<http://www.whidbeycd.org/local-agriculture.html>
Features a variety of resources for local food, for both the consumer and producer.

Opportunities in October, November, and Beyond

With fall still underway and winter arriving soon, farms and other vendors come together in unique ways to connect with consumers. Below are examples of places where you can purchase local food on Whidbey this winter. Check it out!

- **Farm Stands** – Some of Whidbey's farm stands remain open all year long. In the cool season, hours can change due to weather or crop availability, so it's best to call ahead or visit each farm's website or Facebook page to ensure you are up-to-date on your favorite farm stand.
- **Cool Season CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Programs** – Several farms on Whidbey Island offer cool-season extensions to their main season CSA. Sign-ups for these CSAs often go fast, so a call in to the farmers directly is encouraged. Deep Harvest Farm in Freeland, for example, has a cool season CSA that runs through December.
- **Farm Mailing Lists** – Sign-up for regular updates from your farmers on their mailing list. Several farms use mailing lists to market their products in the off-season. For example, four farms in central Whidbey come together for Endless Summer, a weekly mailing list that allows consumers to order and pick-up on Saturdays from Rosehip Farm in Coupeville starting on October 22. Contact Linda Bartlett at rosehip@whidbey.net for more information.
- **Markets** – Markets are great social events, and a way to meet your farmers all at one place and time. The Bayview Farmers Market remains open Saturdays through the end of October 2016, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. The Clinton, Coupeville, Langley, Oak Harbor, and South Whidbey Tilth Markets have closed for the season and will reopen in spring. The Oak Harbor Holiday Market, held at Hummingbird Farm Nursey and Gardens features local products each Saturday, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m., from October 15 to December 24. The Bayview Holiday Market will open its doors at Bayview Community Hall on Saturdays, starting November 26 through December 17, 8 a.m – 4 p.m.
- **Grocery Stores, Restaurants, & Caterers** – Grocery stores throughout Whidbey Island continue to feature local products in winter. The Star Store in Langley, Goose Community Grocer in Bayview, Prairie Center Red Apple Market in Coupeville, and Three Sisters Market in San de Fuca, are several stores you can visit. Strike up a conversation with the produce manager to find out what's seasonally available the next time you stop to shop. Restaurants also sport local fare on their menus. Ask about what's fresh from the farm next time you go to your favorite eatery or special order from a caterer.
- **Community & On-Farm Events** – Many farms host celebrations on-site. With fall, comes the harvest. Call up the farms nearest you to see what's on their calendar and if you can attend. Community groups also hold events that feature local farms and their produce, or celebrate slow food. October's *The Haunting of Coupeville* at <http://minref.wixsite.com/coupeville-halloween> features several farms that provide produce and entertainment for the entire family.

As the season of rest approaches, when it comes to finding local food this winter, there is no need to feel restless. Nestled among the contours of the landscape, for sale in farm stands and on store shelves, winter fare is there for the taking and with your next meal you'll be making a feast with what Whidbey's winter has to offer this year.

Kelsi Franzen is the Marketing, Education, and Outreach Coordinator for the Whidbey Island Conservation District. WICD offers many programs and free services to help residents conserve natural resources on private property, whether the property is a working agricultural operation, a small farm, or a home in town. Contact WICD at (360) 678-4708 or wicd@whidbeycd.org. Visit their website at www.whidbeycd.org.