



THIS SPRING REJUVENATE WITH LOCAL FOOD ON YOUR PLATE

Is it just me, or did you, too, find yourself bundled up more often this winter than last? It seems like in just the past two weeks this is how most of my conversations start when I encounter acquaintances and friends who have, like me, disappeared for months into the warmth and coziness of our homes as light waned and temperatures dropped. We as Whidbey Islanders are just now emerging from yet another Pacific Northwest winter to behold instead the welcomed colors, smells, and textures of spring. Our eyes are drawn to the greens, pinks, whites, and yellows, the floral aroma that only a new season can offer. This is a time of new beginnings, fresh starts, of rejuvenation – our energy directly linked with the lengthening of the light that each passing day brings. After months wrapped in extra layers or huddled by the woodstove, our island's painted landscape of deep browns and crisp golds are bursting forth into colorful arrays. I hope you're as excited as I am that with spring, too, comes not just our change in energy and in landscape, but changes on our plates, as well.

When it comes to fresh, locally grown food, we live in a land of choice here on Whidbey. Our island's history of food cultivation stems back millennia, and its stories are written on the land. There is one thing I've learned from calling this place home my entire life – on Whidbey Island, we have choice, but that choice changes every year and is guided by the seasons. We are fostering, in many ways, a food culture today that might remind us of those who came before us. Our island's uniqueness, its specialness, is rooted in its adaptability and flexibility for living with and embracing change.

This time last year I was out in the field, a farmhand working on several of our island's vegetable farms. Laboring through a warm, albeit wetter, winter was an experience that tested my physical endurance, mental fortitude, and increased my respect for my family's farm lineage tenfold. With milder temperatures last year, my crew and I found ourselves harvesting all sorts of raabing brassica vegetables – turnips, pac choi, kale, the list goes on. When you've had a winter with less frequent frosts, many of the crops can survive and, come spring time, as a result you get "raab" – a plant's energy manifesting into nutritious, tender, sweet stalks, leaves, and florets in its pursuit of seed production. A welcomed tasty treat. Last year, I think there was even a day in early February where I was picking purple top turnips in a tank top.

I love that each year, just when I think I can tell you what you might expect from Whidbey's landscape, I am proven otherwise. We live in a land of choice, yet when we choose to eat local, we also choose to live more in sync with the variances that local food brings. Having now spent several seasons focusing on growing and preserving my own food, in addition to supporting my fellow farmers through their roadside stands and farm stores, trips to the farmers markets, and participation in CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs, I reflect on how each season brings with it a bit of unpredictability. And it's this unpredictability that reminds me I still have more to learn . . . and to grow.

I encourage you this spring to embrace a bit of that same unpredictability. To emerge, like me, from the security of your homes and get out in our community to meet your fellow farmers, florists, artisans, crafters, and businesspeople. See what's out there. Observe the changes and note the difference from years previous and relish that within the changes of each year there still lies choice. It's been a colder winter this year than last – no tank tops this time! – and we're just now acquainting ourselves with a bounty we've been used to experiencing several weeks earlier. But that's okay – it's a reminder that the best is yet to come. I was still enjoying squash this past week that I had stored from last year's harvest.

This spring, with change on our mind, consider stopping by any one of our local businesses to meet someone new. It's a good start. Whidbey takes pride in its local small businesses,

some of which have been around for generations and others that are starting out in their first season and are eager to serve you. Expand your sense of community by meeting new neighbors. It may be hard at first, but I promise, it gets easier the more you do it, and soon, neighbors may become friends.

As the days grow longer, perhaps you desire to step out your door and approach your nearest roadside stand or farm store for your weekly produce or a bouquet of flowers! It's a quick, easy way to get freshly picked food and flora right off the farm, at the peak of nutrition and flavor. In addition to our island's grocery stores and restaurants, many of which feature local farm products – just ask a produce manager or chef and they'll tell you what's local and available – perhaps a roadside stand's decorated sign caught your eye recently and you wish to peruse. Go for it! It's a great way to expand your choices, support local, and engage with your community. Whidbey Island is seeing more and more roadside stands and farm stores sprouting up just like the new growth that this spring season offers. Goosefoot, a local non-profit organization in Bayview, is currently maintaining a Whidbey Island Road Side Farm Stand, Farm Store, and Farmers Market Directory. Although Goosefoot is still in the process of updating the directory for 2017, you can check out last year's stores to see which ones are nearest you at <http://www.goosefoot.org/pdf/farmstands.pdf>.

Maybe you're like me and, with friends calling you up to pay you a visit from out-of-town, you might want to take a warm weekend day to show off your island home and make your purchases a social event. The Farmers Market model may be the perfect fit for you! Three of our island's farmers markets are already open for you to visit, and which feature local farmers, artisans, crafters, and more. Several other markets will be opening just around the corner. Many of the markets accept EBT (electronic benefit transfer) and WIC (Women Infants & Children), allowing accessibility for all walks of life. Below and at www.whidbeycd.org/local-agriculture/ are Whidbey's local market times for the 2017 season.

Oak Harbor Farmers Market

Open Thursdays, 4 p.m. – 7 p.m., May 18 – September 28, on State Route 20 next to North Whidbey Middle School in Oak Harbor.

Coupeville Farmers Market

Open Saturdays, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., April 1 – October 4, on the Village Green next to the Coupeville Library off NW Alexander Street in Coupeville.

South Whidbey Tilth

Open Sundays, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m., April 30 – October 1, at 2812 Thompson Road and State Route 525, in Langley.

Bayview Farmers Market

Open Saturdays, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., April 29 – October 21, on Bayview Road at State Route 525.

Other outdoor markets on island this season include:

Langley Second Street Market

Open Fridays, 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., May 5 – September 29, on 2nd Street in downtown Langley.

Clinton Thursday Market

Open Thursdays, 3:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m., July 6 – August 3, Clinton Community Hall, at 6411 South Central Ave in Clinton.

With all this choice for fresh and local on Whidbey, yet another option exists – one that requires a bit more commitment, yet encourages creativity, fun, and community – the CSA. Many of Whidbey's farms now feature Community Supported Agriculture programs in which you as the consumer pledge to support a local farm, or group of farms, by paying the farmer a specific amount up front for a weekly share of the farm's produce over a given period of time. Often this is during the growing season, April - October. Both the producer and the consumer share the risks and benefits of food production, tying us all back to the seasons, and to each other, as change happens. There are many farms that provide multiple size options to suit various eating needs. Check out <http://bit.ly/2pntab3> and www.whidbeycd.org/local-agriculture/ to see which Whidbey farms near you offer CSA programs. Sign up now, as spots are often limited. Every week is a new experience with a CSA, a reversal cooking process from the grocery store model. It's well worth experimenting for at least one season – I'm sure if you sign up, you'll be coming back next year, just like me.

We live in a land of choice. As you shake off the dust from winter and stretch your muscles, I hope you'll chose local, again and again, in whatever way suits you best. Whether you're at the market, a member of a CSA program, stopping by a roadside stand, grocery store, or restaurant, we're all part of this Whidbey Island community and its landscape – by choice.



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Thank You to All Our Valued Customers, Friends, and Neighbors
...and Stay Tuned as We Renovate Our Farm in 2017!

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