

# Preserve Farmers Market Produce



I will preserve farmers market produce again this summer. Sometimes the garden just doesn't have a good year. For me, lately this is the norm instead of the exception. I don't know when I lost my green thumb but it seems to be conversely related to the increase in animal life on our farm. Animals take time. Stall cleaning, coop cleaning, cleaning up everywhere, all takes time. Twice a day watering takes time. Feeding grain or filling hay mangers takes time. And that leaves less time for gardening. I did get the garden planted as usual. Some vegetables did well. Surprisingly we have healthy carrots growing for the first time! Lots of lettuce and spinach this spring and hopefully the beans, cucumbers and kale will continue to do well.

No matter how well the garden does from this point, it won't

be enough to supply us with freshly canned vegetables for winter. I have a choice of buying canned or frozen vegetables from the supermarket or buying locally grown produce from the farmers, and processing it for our family's use. My choice has been and continues to be buying from the local farmers. Those who have time to focus on growing, to take steps to correct problems as they arise, and to bring produce to market.



Beets – Organic produce on display at the Farmers Market.

## Locating Your Farmers Markets

The first place many of us travel to now, when trying to find a location is google. Try searching under ***Farmers Market near \*Your Town and State\**** When I searched for results in my area generally, I came upon this website with listings by state and local areas. A caution about this site, it did not

list our county farmers markets but did list some market stands for some local farmers. The results for any area may have outdated information so please check the listings carefully.

Ask friends and neighbors where they like to purchase farm fresh produce. The best advertising is a satisfied customer!

The local government offices should also have a listing of farmers markets. This could be under the Extension Office, or the Health Department.

## **Take Time to Talk to the Farmers and Vendors at the Market**

When you find the market and get ready to shop, these are my recommendations for you.

The first time you visit the market be prepared to spend more time than you will need during future visits. Take time to visit as many of the vendors as possible. Look at the quality of the produce. Does it look fresh? How is it displayed? Get a feeling for the produce available.

Talk to the vendors and farmers. Find out the farming practices they use, without passing judgement. Many farmers use chemical weed prevention and chemical insect products. This is what you want to know but this is not the place to debate the practice. All farmers have the choice of how they want to grow the produce on their farm. While many of us may not like the use of chemicals on our produce, my recommendation is to thank them and move on. This is what you want to know and the farmers market is not the place to change the farmers mind. You will find the right farmers and the right produce for you.

Get to know the vendors that meet your goals for fresh produce. If you are a good customer, I have found they are

willing to bring you boxes of seconds or reserve a bushel of beans for you. The produce on the table is likely to be the prettiest and best looking. If you are canning, you might be ok with purchasing the ugly fruit and vegetables. Don't hesitate to ask if they have canning quality. The flavor should be the same, but the price should be less.



## **Buy the Amount You Can Process Quickly**

This point is probably my favorite reason to preserve farmers market produce. You can choose what to can and how much to buy, based on how much time you have available. When you finish one task, you can then return to the market to purchase more produce. For example, this week I purchased half a bushel of green beans and 6 bunches of fresh beets. This takes the pressure off my rather cramped schedule this summer. I can finish canning the half bushel of green beans without feeling overwhelmed by a full bushel that is starting to pass it's

prime. When we have experienced successful garden years, I felt overwhelmed when the tomatoes, beans, and squash all came in at once. So, that is my silver lining in the cloud of not receiving a full garden harvest the last few years.

Variety is often better when preserving farmers market produce. There's always going to be a variety or type of vegetable that you didn't know about or hadn't tried before. This is a great opportunity to preserve some of that new tasty treat for winter.



**Does it Cost More to Preserve**

# Farmers Market Produce ?

If you take into consideration the time, cost of seed, fertilizer, compost if needed, and the cost of replanting if the crop fails, it comes out pretty close. I personally think that if I give a crop a try, do the best I can and it fails, buying more seed, spending more time and then possible failing again might not be in my best interest.

Now on the other hand, if your time is free, you love gardening, and you have a long growing season to try again, then you will save money by growing your own.

In any event, considering preserving farmers market produce can fill your needs in some way. Maybe you just need to fill in a couple vegetables that didn't do well in your garden. Or possibly you had other obligations this year and couldn't garden at all. Don't miss out on eating fresh, nutritious, tasty produce all year long. Try visiting your local Farmers Market and preserve farmers market produce this year.

