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MAKING THE MOST OF LOCAL PRODUCE

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Now is the prime of fresh, local produce season, and the perfect time to take part in the farm-to-table movement. Whether you join a community supported agriculture (CSA) group or shop for fresh produce at your local farmers' market, it's easy to see – and taste – how the fruits (and vegetables) of a regional farmer's labor are the freshest. As time goes on, and the bags get bigger and brighter, you may need to get creative to extend the life and use of your weekly bounty.

"Seasonal farmers' markets and CSAs provide us with incredible colors, flavors and nutrients," said Chef Candice Kumai, author of the new book "[Clean Green Eats](#)." "Because everything is so plentiful, it is important to take some time to strategize how to get the most out of all of your delicious, farm-fresh produce."

Plan, prioritize and prepare

Planning ahead will help determine what produce you purchase. Many farmers' markets and CSAs distribute weekly eNewsletters and flyers that provide advance notice as to what will be available. You can also search for seasonality charts in your region to get an idea of what items are at their peak, and design your menus accordingly.

Once you've gathered your basket or received your weekly CSA bag, prioritize your goods. Use tender greens and any ripe fruits and veggies right away. Roots, bulbs and squash tend to last quite a while, and can be saved for later in the week.

Next, properly clean and prepare produce to help to extend its life. Immediately remove the greens from items like beets and kohlrabi so they don't continue to draw moisture out. Wash and rinse leafy greens to keep them in top shape. Be sure to dry the leaves thoroughly in a salad spinner or with

towels, and store until ready to use. If fridge space is limited, consider cooking down your greens by either partially boiling or sautéing prior to putting them away, depending on what recipes you've selected for those items.

Smoothies, sauces and soups

Smoothies are a quick and easy way to incorporate a multitude of produce. The [Sunset Smoothie](#), for example, blends Swiss chard and spinach with the sweetness of beets and pineapple. Throw everything into the [Vitamix Professional Series 300](#), which can process even the toughest whole foods like dark, leafy greens, and blend your way to a delicious and nutritious drink.

When tomatoes come in season, it's the perfect time to start preparing pasta sauces to be consumed fresh, or frozen and saved for mid-winter dinners. Try utilizing red and green bell peppers, and even carrot shavings, to boost the nutritional value of a veggie Bolognese. [Pestos](#) are your friend, especially those that include farmers' market staples. Nearly any fresh herb or green vegetable can become a delicious pesto-style sauce when combined with nuts, oil, garlic and grated cheese in a blender, like any of the [Vitamix blenders](#).

"Pesto is a fresh and delicious way to use up herbs and extra greens. I blend in leftover kale, basil, arugula and spinach into mine," Kumai said. "You can also use summer produce like peas, herbs, kale, honeydew melon, mint and basil to blend into cold summer soups."

Soups make use of veggies now and later. Warm weather calls for cool concoctions like a [gazpacho](#) or cucumber dill soup. A [cabbage soup](#) that combines hearty potatoes, onions and carrots can be made for cool fall nights or stored in your freezer; you'll thank yourself mid-winter.

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Use it up

Remember that nearly all parts of produce are usable. Vegetables like beets, carrots, kohlrabi and turnips have attached greens that are edible. They make an excellent addition to your morning smoothie or to amp up a stir fry. Once you've made it through all of the pieces and parts, consider creating a compost pile. It's a great way to put your waste to good use.

Don't be afraid of items with bruises or dents. They may not look pretty, but you can certainly add them into your smoothies early in the week. Greens with slightly wilted leaves can be blended with a bit of water and frozen in ice cube trays for future use in soups or smoothies. If you see a great deal on fruit like strawberries or cherries, buy them and combine with sugar and pectin for an easy freezer jam, or dry them out for on-the-go snacks in between school, work or the gym.

Shopping for the majority of your whole foods at farmers' markets or joining a local CSA is an opportunity to use a handful of different skills and explore your culinary interests. The availability of specific fruits and vegetables ebbs and flows; however, if you capture them at their peak, you'll enjoy the bounty throughout the year and feel good about buying local.

Sunset Smoothie

Ingredients:

1 cup water
2 cups pineapple chunks, core included
1 orange, peeled, halved
¼ cup scrubbed, quartered beets
¼ cup chopped carrot
Sliver of fresh ginger, unpeeled
1 cup fresh spinach
1 cup Swiss chard
½ avocado, peeled, pitted
6-8 fresh cilantro leaves
2-3 small broccoli florets
1 cup ice cubes

Directions:

1. Place all ingredients into the Vitamix container in the order listed and secure lid.
2. Select Variable 1.
3. Turn machine on and slowly increase speed to Variable 10, then to High.
4. Blend for 1 minute or until desired consistency is reached.