



Extension News Column

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Produce is flooding our local market. Whether you are choosing from the Farmer's Market or from your local supermarket, it is important that you choose the most flavorful produce for your dollars.

We've all gotten spoiled with having fruits and vegetables readily available all year around. Grapes come from Chile in the middle of winter and melons right now are imported from Mexico. Granted, we pay a premium price for them, but they are always available if we are willing to pay the price.

But if you are interested in buying the most flavorful produce, you need to remember that it is best to buy cheap. When produce is at the height of its production cycle, it is the most flavorful and the least expensive.

It is a good idea to remember what is the production cycle on fruits and vegetables. Knowing this cycle can tell us when to buy for the best price and the best quality. Our growing cycles here in Fairbanks are much slower than those in the lower 48 where much of the grocery store produce originates. For the purpose of this news column, we'll review the grocery store cycle, then talk about the Farmer's Market here in Fairbanks.

In the grocery store, look for these fruits and vegetables:

Spring-arugula, asparagus, collard greens, snap and snow peas, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, and strawberries

Summer-peaches, plums, pears, cherries, peppers

Fall-brussel sprouts, carrots, cauliflower, citrus fruits, cranberries, kale, mustard greens, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, turnips, winter squash

At the Farmer's Market, our local cycle is much shorter. So here's the rundown by month.

May: hot house: cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, some lettuce, herbs

June: cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce, herbs, spinach, peppers

July: cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce, herbs, spinach, peppers, some squashes, some early season berries

August: cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce, herbs, spinach, peppers, squashes, berries, root vegetables beginning to appear

September: cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce, herbs, spinach, peppers, squashes, berries, root vegetables, hard squashes, late berries, some apples

This list is not completely inclusive, because weather and planting has a lot to do with when things appear at the Market. It is just a ballpark estimate.

If you are interested in scoring some local produce, check out this very helpful website. Folks can type in their zip code and get contact information on CSA's and Farmer's Markets. <http://www.localharvest.org/>

You can buy produce year around, but you risk biting into fruit that is mealy or brown inside if it is out of season. So buy your produce when it is in season for the best flavor and price.

One more thing, don't store bruised or damaged fruit. Eat it right away, but first cut off the bruised part. Bacteria can thrive in the bruised parts.

Let's go back to one of my earlier columns. A few weeks ago, I talked about saving gasoline while driving. One of the suggestions said to consider your tire pressure. A reader called and suggested that tires should be inflated to the pressure recommended by the tire manufacturer, not to the amount recommended for the car. That makes good sense here in Alaska where we sometimes choose to have non-standard tires on our vehicles for safety or durability reasons. Thanks to that reader for calling.