



Hardy Abundance



Buttery Butternut and Sausage Pasta

WHY WE SHOULD BUNDLE UP AND HEAD TO THE FARMERS MARKET, EVEN IN THE WINTER!

Alyssa Thayer

IT'S DOWNRIGHT DELIGHTFUL TO STROLL LANES of farmers market stalls amid the warm summer sunshine. But bundling up on a frigid January morning—that takes a bit more resolve.

When the cold months roll in, local food, particularly local produce, is all too often pushed to the back of our minds, waiting to be called up again in spring. Traditionally, winter farmers markets have only attracted the grittiest of farmers and the most devout of shoppers. But there are good reasons to expand this pastime beyond just the diehards.

“Now more than ever, with supply chain issues and skyrocketing food prices, it’s a no-brainer to make the extra effort and find a local source for your food,” says Christy Campli, owner of Growing Roots Partners.

While winter market conditions require a bit more preparation and resilience than their warm-weather counterparts, these markets still check every box of the feel-good-eat-well checklist: we get outside (good for immune and nervous systems), support the local economy, connect with our community, access great ingredients and shrink our carbon footprint—all at once!

Getting outside in the winter is a bit like getting exercise. It may sound like the last thing we want to do. But afterwards, we feel great and are thankful we made the effort.

For my family, it’s not optional. I have two young boys who turn feral if left inside for too long. By mid-morning, we have to get out, breathe fresh air and burn off extra energy ... or else! While I might not always choose to meet the arctic air head-on, afterwards, I feel better ... always.

Now you might be thinking, ‘OK, I’m intrigued. But if I get all bundled up and head out to the market, will there even be anything there to buy?’

The short answer, YES!

COLD WEATHER BOUNTY

The choices in winter markets are undeniably different from those of warmer seasons. Yet there’s still immeasurable bounty to be had—from hardy roots to leafy greens, to winter squash and high-tunnel lettuces.

First frosts mark the end for many autumn crops, but some veggies are actually at their best this time of year. There’s a sweet spot—after the first frosts but before the ground freezes—when vegetables like brassicas (kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, cabbages), leeks and root vegetables (carrots, beets, turnips) become their most delicious selves.

Frigid temperatures put these plants into distress, triggering a process that transforms stored starches into sugars in an effort to keep the plant from freezing. The result? Less bitter flavors and more sweetness.

Alongside late-season veggies, many hardy fall crops can still be found on market tables for months to come. They’re harvested and kept in cold/dry storage throughout the winter. This is a blessing as it offers us nutrients and delicious ingredients that match up

Field Notes and Quotes

“Food still grows regardless of the season! I think it’s very important to embrace seasonality and especially to support local farmers and food makers in every season of the year.”

Christy Campli, owner/operator of Growing Roots Partners, which runs markets in Malvern and Eagleview.

“We love the winter markets because they help our farmers and food artisans remain financially sustainable. Two of our vegetable farms have high tunnels where they can grow amazing greens all year round without any heat. Spinach and kale produce more sugar in these cold growing conditions and are tender and delicious.”

– Liz Andersen, Manager of the Phoenixville Farmers market.

Winter markets keep us connected to our communities and the seasonality of food, while continuing to strengthen the local economy year round. Winter is naturally less abundant than the heavy harvest seasons of summer and fall, but you can find local dairy, meats, baked goods (some made with local grain!), mushrooms, storage crops like roots, cold-kissed greens and tender lettuces grown by farmers who extend the season in high tunnels. A fresh salad in winter tastes amazing!

– Ros Fenton, Farmers Market Manager for Kennett Collaborative

You’ll find winter markets to explore in the Farmers Market sidebar in the Best Things To Do feature in this issue.

perfectly with our seasonal cravings for slow-simmered stews and crisp-roasted veggies.

And although not originally part of the winter playbook, modern agriculture (specifically high tunnel greenhouses) allows us to enjoy fresh tender baby greens all winter long.

Beyond the seasonal and stored produce, there are certain farm fresh products that are always available. Ask any dairy farmer, egg collector or mushroom grower—there are no days off. The cows, goats, chickens and fungi—much like my toddlers—are unphased by the time of the year. These farmers need outlets for their products all year long.

And let’s not forget the plethora of value-added items that are canned, preserved, brewed, baked and more to allow us to enjoy endless epicurean pleasure from farmers markets all year long. A hunk of fresh bread slathered with butter or a soft artisan cheese is, hands down, the best accompaniment to any winter soup. Preserves and pickled products offer us a pop of freshness during darker months, while sips of tea, coffee or something a bit stronger (local spirits anyone?) are the perfect way to unwind and savor the shorter days and cozy moments of the season.

So, bundle up and head out to winter farmers markets and explore the season’s bounty.

THE ROOTS LESS TAKEN

This winter let’s conjure a bit of culinary courage and opt for the slightly less-known members of the vegetable kingdom. Here are

a few of our favorites to eat more of this winter. They're good and good for you, so be bold this winter.

- **Celeriac** (aka celery root) is a gnarly-looking root relative of the common celery stocks. It boasts a similar herbaceous taste, but grows into a large bulb, so no stringiness! Use a paring knife to remove the thick knobby skin before cooking or enjoying it raw.

- **Rutabaga** (aka swede) is a large round root vegetable that's purple at the top and beige at the tip. Once you remove the thick, often waxy skin, you'll find a sweet, yellowish flesh that's wonderful roasted or boiled and pureed into a silky mash.

- **Parsnips** resemble white-colored carrots. They have a sweet earthiness that goes well in any stew or hash. And like their other root vegetable friends, they're high in nutrients and fiber.

- **Kohlrabi** is a relative of wild cabbage. The thick peel of the greenish or purplish bulb should be removed before eating or cooking as it's too fibrous. You can, however, eat the rest, including the large leaves that when thinly sliced and sautéed, can be eaten as a leafy green. Or enjoy it as a raw, crunchy snack or season it up and cook.

- **Daikon** is a type of radish, although it looks more like a plump, long white carrot. It's a heavy hitter in Japanese cuisine and can be enjoyed raw, cooked or pickled. Because of its mild sweetness, it's the perfect veggie for anyone who doesn't enjoy the peppery finish of most radishes. Like other brassicas, daikons are sweetest in the winter and offer a nice crisp freshness when our palates need it most.

- **Radicchio** is a maroon-and-white colored leaf vegetable from the chicory family, known for their bitter flavor. Between the vibrant

color and robust flavor, it provides a welcomed pop of flavor and color to any salad or dish. Often used raw in a salad, it's also delicious roasted or grilled.

THE CURE FOR ROAST-A-PHOBIA

Now that you've braved the winter farmers market and selected new vegetables to try, the next challenge is cooking your treasures properly.

I hope you agree that there's nothing quite like perfectly roasted veggies. That delicacy, without a doubt, is my favorite way to enjoy the many splendors of winter markets. That said, until recently, roasting vegetables felt like a game of culinary roulette. I'd slide them into the oven and simply pray they'd turn out edible.

After attempting, researching, trying, burning and retrying, I think I've finally cracked the code for how to consistently create delicious roast veggies. Here are my secrets from hard-earned lessons:

- **Precise Slice.** While it might seem obvious, different size veggies have different cooking times. I often chopped haphazardly and ended up with small burnt bits and large raw chunks. Making an effort to keep pieces uniform is a key first step.

- **Fully Coated.** Once your veggies are chopped, throw them into a large bowl and toss with oil until each piece has a uniform sheen. While many cooking tutorials pour oil directly over the pan after the veggies are added, I find this risky. Some pieces may be dry while others sit in puddles of oil.

- **Complete the Preheat.** Ensure your oven is fully preheated and hot (we'll get to temps later) before adding your veggies. In a too-hot oven, juices from the veggies are released and evaporate instantly. If the temp is too low, moisture remains and can yield soggy veggies. Also, as ovens preheat, temperatures are uneven. Items on racks adjacent to the coils or flames will likely burn while others will start at too low of a temperature.

- **Crank the Heat.** Roasting works by caramelizing the outside of each piece. This chemical reaction only occurs at very high temperatures and in the absence of moisture. If done correctly, the taste becomes deeper and sweeter as the texture becomes crisper. The actual temperature depends on your oven (mine runs hot), but somewhere between 410°F and 440°F is the sweet spot.

- **Give them Space.** Continuing the theme above, by allowing space around each vegetable piece and avoiding crowding, you're allowing steam to release and evaporate immediately, resulting in that golden crispiness we're striving for.

- **Perfect Pan.** Having enough surface area is a key for pan selection. While I grew up with roasted veggies in a casserole dish (no shame in that game), I've become a sheet-pan convert. If you want a hard, crisp roast, it's just not possible in a pan with deep walls.

- **Time & Turn.** Because you're using high heat and a conductive metal sheet pan, there's no set-it-and-forget-it. Roasted veggies need to be turned at least once, if not a few times, to avoid getting too dark on any given side.



- **Timing Guide.** For roasting at 425°F with ½-inch-thick pieces, here are general cook times. Whatever you're cooking, begin to check on them at 15 minutes.

- *Thin veggies* (asparagus, green beans) 10 to 15 minutes. Note: check frequently, these puppies burn quickly!

- *Soft veggies* (zucchini, bell pepper, summer squash) 12 to 18 minutes. Note: spread out due to high water content.

- *Brassicas* (Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower) 25 to 35 minutes.
- *Squash and tubers* (butternut squash, potatoes, yams) 30 to 35 minutes.

- *Root vegetables* (carrots, beets, parsnips, rutabaga) 35 to 45 minutes.

THE REWARDS OF THE MARKET

Eating seasonally is not a gimmick. Anatomically, our bodies crave more hardy, nutrient-dense foods in the winter, and that just happens to be what's available. A warm potage, a hardy savory salad, a hunk of fresh bread slathered with artisan cheese or butter—they all come together to nourish and delight us through the doldrums of winter.

During these shorter and darker winter evenings, I seek warmth and comfort—from the glow of a flickering candle, from my favorite pair of wool slippers and from the warmth of a steamy bowl of soup.

To find a few more special recipes to make this season tastier, go to CountyLinesMagazine.com for Buttery Butternut and Sausage Pasta, Winter Blues Salad.

Enjoy the bounty of winter farmers markets!

Candlelight Carrot Soup

2 lbs. whole carrots, chopped into ½-inch thick pieces
4 T. olive oil
2 small or 1 large onion, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. ginger, minced
½ tsp. coriander
½ tsp. cumin
4 C. vegetable broth
Salt and pepper to taste



Preheat oven to 425°F.

In a large bowl, toss carrots with 2 tablespoons of olive oil and a pinch of salt and pepper. Spread carrots out onto two large sheet pans, ensuring there's space for air movement between the pieces (no crowding). Roast for 30–40 minutes (until browned and tender), turning half way through.

While carrots roast, warm a heavy bottom pan (such as a Dutch oven) over medium heat. Add remaining 2 tablespoons of oil and allow to warm. Add onion and a generous pinch of salt and pepper. Sauté until soft and translucent (3–5 minutes). Add garlic, ginger, coriander and cumin, continuing to stir so it doesn't burn.

Once mixture is soft and fragrant, add carrots and broth into the pot and bring to a boil. Drop down to a simmer and allow to cook and meld together for 10 minutes.

Take off heat and allow to sit until cool enough to pour carefully into a blender (an immersion blender also works). Puree on high until silky smooth. Pour back into pot and keep warm over low heat until serving.

Note: I love to serve this topped with toasted pepitas and alongside a fresh batch of crispy cheddar cheese quesadillas for dipping.

Serves: 4–6. ♦

Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table. Alyssa writes the Brandywine Table column.



For more great recipes visit CountyLinesMagazine.com

