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## The Early Bird Gets the ... Asparagus Orinda Farmers' Market now open

Laurie Snyder



Plump strawberries were just a few of the goodies sold at the Orinda Farmer's Market, which opened March 3 - two months earlier than in previous years. Photo Laurie Snyder

The temperature was perfect and the sky was that spectacular shade of blue that makes even long-time Bay Area natives look up and stare in wonder at the earliest season opening ever for the Orinda Farmers' Market March 3.

Contra Costa Certified Farmers' Markets (CCFM) made the decision to open Orinda's fresh produce paradise two months earlier in response to residents' "overriding request that we extend the season," explained Janice Faust, CCFM's on-site manager.

"All of our regular growers are returning," said Faust. Back for her fifteenth year, she described the vendors as "like family."

Browsers in search of healthy fare found seafood, cage-free eggs and mounds of colorful fresh fruits and veggies. Steve's Bees, Ruvalcaba Nursery and other familiar faces were on hand with several new vendors projected to work their way into the mix over the next few weeks and months. Orinda's own Yogi's Cooking provided Indian Fusion dishes, side-by-side with the crepe stand and fresh pasta from Il Pastaio.

Vendors will "join us as the weeks pass - when their crops ripen," added Faust, who also noted that she and her CCFM colleagues are "out scouting new farmers and

vendors," based on requests and suggestions that they receive from market attendees.

According to CCFM, other gastronomic goodies slated to be available include six of "Spring's Splendid Seven": artichokes - at their peak, asparagus, green garlic, spring greens, spring onions, and strawberries. The seventh, fava bean leaves, will be on sale in late March, and may be used in place of basil or to add a tasty twist to quiche dishes.

Market managers are adding a new hair feather person who is expected to be a particular hit with tweens, and have also scheduled Theresa Rodgers for March 17. Rodgers, a Crockett resident, recently co-authored the well-received "Dharma Feast Cookbook: Recipes for a Fresh Start."

But it was the new weekly produce drawing that generated the most buzz with the adults in the crowd. Opening day attendees learned that this year, a different market fan will win a box of fresh produce every week, courtesy of CCFM. To participate, just fill out the entry form at the manager's stand. Winners will be announced each Wednesday.

This year's events will run rain or shine along Orinda Way in front of the Community Park on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. through November 17. A calendar of upcoming musical performances, as well as recipes and veggie prep tips are available on the CCFM web site: [www.ccfm.org](http://www.ccfm.org). Or, check out CCFM and its vendors on Twitter.

And remember, Fang and Toto need to stay home. The Contra Costa Health Department does not allow pets at farmers' markets.

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