

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Pick a Peck of Harvest Homecoming

By Cynthia Brian

"Tickle it with a hoe and it will laugh into a harvest."

English Saying

As kids, after a summer of utilizing the grape tanks as our private swimming pools, September ushered in the seriousness of harvesting in the vineyards. My entire family worked in the fields alongside the Mexican laborers picking grapes from dawn to dusk. The most exciting part of the day would be "the haul" when one of us would be chosen to accompany my dad to the winery pulling two tank trailers filled to the brim with Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, or Sauvignon Blanc, depending on which varietal had reached its peak sugar content. When the autumn weather was exceedingly hot, the hauls could be thrice a day. Often we didn't return to the farm until long after dark, yet my mom's table awaited, laden with a garden feast. On days when we weren't picking, we manned the fruit and vegetable stand selling just picked produce from our orchards as well as freshly laid eggs to the city slickers for pennies on the dollar.

Fall harvest! Could any two words evoke more delicious memories? From mouth-watering tomatoes to plump purple eggplants, crisp tangy apples, and sunflowers on the sundeck, September is a cornucopia of scrumptious freshness ripe with expectation. If you hoed a spring garden, or have been tending a fruit orchard for a few years, this is the season of plenty. For those of you who prefer to let others do the sowing and growing, I have prepared a list of some of the just-harvested produce for purchase from farmer's markets, corner stands, or your neighbors' kids.

Grapes	Peppers
Blackberries	Tomatillos
Apples	Zucchini
Figs	Cucumbers
Pears	Squash
Plums	Olives
White Peaches	Beets
Nectarines	Beans
Elderberries	Carrots
Raspberries	Onions
Sweet Corn	Horseradish
Tomatoes	Melons
Sweet Potatoes	Lemons
Eggplants	Quince

HARVEST STANDS

Your garden isn't producing these yummy indulgences? May I suggest a day trip to local farms. Tap into your inner farmer, grab your overalls, and head to the fields for farm fresh food. In Contra Costa County, a drive to Brentwood is your best resource. A Non-Profit Organization dedicated to educating the general public and "foodies" about farming and its products while improving Agri-tourism education in the Brentwood Region is Harvest Time. They publish the Farm Trail Map of U-pick locals as well as a harvest calendar. You'll be able to find your favorite produce ripe and ready in addition to flowers, condiments, nuts, and other goodies. Since there are over 40 farms to choose from, visit <http://www.harvest4you.com/> for more information.

About an hour north in Solano County, seasonal fruit and vegetable stands dot the country roads with local farmers providing the just picked pleasures.

Cal Yee Farms

5158 Clayton Road, Suisun Valley
(707) 425-5377
www.calyee.com (Open year-round)

Erickson Ranch Produce Stand & Dahlia Garden

2482 Cordelia Road, Suisun Valley
(707) 864-0557
www.ericksonranch.com (Seasonal: June-November)

Larry's Produce

Corner of Suisun Valley and Ledgewood Roads, Suisun Valley
(707) 864-8068 (Seasonal: June-December)

Parker Farms

2991 Rockville Road, Suisun Valley
(707) 422-2915 (Seasonal: July-October)

FYI, Cal Yee and Larry's Produce are my personal favorites. Venture across the bridge to Sonoma County where the back roads are strewn with homegrown stalls. These modern day produce stands are a far cry from my childhood rustic two saw horses buttressing a plank of plywood creation, yet they offer field to table freshness and flavor you won't find anywhere except in your personal potager.

Whether you want to eat fresh, can, freeze, dry,



Sunflowers

Photos Cynthia Brian



Beets

Photos Cynthia Brian

make sauces, pies, cobblers, cider, jellies, or jams, load up your wagon this is the month with ranch indulgences. Like the squirrels gathering acorns, jumpstart your winter stores with the nutrients and essence of healthy crops. With the harvest homecoming, it's time to pick-a-peck to make those pickled peppers. Hmmm, hmmm good! Bon appetite.