

What's in Season from the Garden State

Biweekly Highlights from Cooperative Extension, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

June 23, 2008

New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Jersey Fresh & Seafood Availability Report

Current: Squash - yellow and
Arugula zucchini
Baby Arugula & Baby Swiss Chard - until
Spinach mid-July
Basil Turnips
Beets

Forecast:
Blueberries Cantalopes - mid-
Cabbage July
Cilantro Eggplant - mid-July
Collards Nectarines and
Cucumbers peaches - mid-July
Dandelions Peppers - mid-July
Dill Sweet corn - 1st
Escarole & Endive week of July
- until mid-July Tomatoes - 1st week
Kale of July
Leeks & Green On-
ions

Mint
Parsley
Pickles
Radishes - finishing
up



Farm Raised Hard Clams & Oysters

Littlenecks/Middle-
necks
Cherrystones, Chow-
ders, Topnecks
Cape May Salt Oys-
ters



Bluefish
Butterfish
Flounder
Ling
Lobster
Monktail (Day
Boat)
Scup (Porgies)
Sea Scallops
(Day Boat)
Skate Wings
Squid

Starting the Season with the End in Mind

The popularity of the 100 mile diet (<http://100milediet.org/>) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, has many people re-thinking their food purchases and contemplating local food sources. Hence, summertime in New Jersey has local food enthusiasts filled with anticipation – we've been buying produce from California, Florida, Chile and parts unknown all winter long. Surely people from New Jersey couldn't attempt a 100 mile diet through the winter...or could we?

While a strict adherence to a diet of completely local food in our metropolitan region is improbable (yet could be a surefire weight loss diet), extending the availability of local food from spring, summer and fall into the winter is actually quite feasible.

As the previously mentioned resources demonstrate, the most likely means of providing for winter is to do as our ancestors have done before us – to preserve it. Can it, pickle it, dry it - and now the modern convenience of freezing it. But why bother going to all that trouble when you can just grab a pre-packaged food out of the pantry or freezer instead of laboring over your local fresh purchases?

The difference is that the food your local farmer grew and you bought locally and then lovingly preserved has *significance*. The Pillsbury toaster strudel or the Lean Cuisine roasted vegetable pizza have no more significance in New Jersey than they do in Nebraska. But when you tell your kids the pancakes are made with the frozen blueberries that we picked last summer, or delight your guests with sun-dried Jersey tomatoes on their spring greens, your meal makes a statement.

So, at the beginning of the season, keep the end in mind. How many peaches should you buy if you are going to freeze some? If you invest in a food dehydrator, you can have a winter supply of dried Jersey blueberries, peaches, nectarines, tomatoes, apples, sweet potato and cranberries. Long after the Jack O'lantern hits the compost, an uncut Jersey pumpkin in a cool dry place can last until spring.

While we're on the subject of keeping the end in mind, another end to contemplate is the immediate end – that is, what do we do with the scraps from our Jersey Fresh purchases: tomato, eggplant and pepper stems; melon rinds; cucumber, potato and onion peels; and apple cores? If they are tossed in the trash, the natural cycle ends there. Composting those scraps instead allows us to reclaim those nutrients and return them to the soil and in turn support new plant growth. If you are as concerned about the integrity of what goes into your garden as much as what goes onto your plate, then knowing what your compost is derived from will enhance your quality control.

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- If conditions are dry, add enough water to the compost pile so that the ingredients are as wet as a wrung out sponge. Lack of water will slow down the composting process. Excessive water may cause anaerobic organisms to dominate and produce unpleasant odors.
- Proper aeration and oxygen: Mix the compost at least once a week during the spring, summer and fall and once a month during the winter. You can use a garden fork or pitchfork to mix and turn the compost pile ingredients.
- Add a shovel of garden soil to your compost pile. Garden soils are teaming with the micro-organisms necessary for the decomposition process. You do not need to buy any special ingredients for composting.

Where to find Jersey Fresh? Ask for it where you shop or dine or go to:
<http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov>

To receive these reports by e-mail:
njfarmfresh@njaes.rutgers.edu
 Web: <http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu>
 For your county Rutgers Cooperative Extension office go to:
<http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/county>

From Jersey Fresh to Brown Gold: Compost it!

Bill Hlubik, Agricultural and Resource Management Agent, Rutgers, NJAES, Cooperative Extension of Middlesex County

You can start a compost pile at any time of the year, but now is a great time to get started. Jersey Fresh vegetable and fruit waste are excellent ingredients for composting. They contain a good ratio of carbon to nitrogen for rapid decomposition. These organic components are broken down into a great product for improving poor soils and adding valuable nutrients for plants.

I keep a one gallon airtight container in the kitchen for fruit and vegetable scraps and cut scraps into small pieces to help speed up decomposition in the compost pile. Select a container large enough to hold scraps for two or three days so you can make fewer trips to the compost pile.

You can compost all of your fruit and vegetable scraps, shredded paper, leaves, weeds without seeds, excess lawn clippings and ash from the fireplace. Do not compost meats, bones, or any food scraps with oil or soap residues. Avoid composting pet waste due to possible disease transmission and potential odor problems.

The same processes that occur in a compost pile happen every day in nature as old leaves, twigs, plants and even animals decompose back into their basic organic components. The rate of decomposition depends on temperature, moisture, nature of the ingredients and the type and balance of micro-organisms present for the compost pile. A ratio between 15:1 or 30:1 of carbon to nitrogen is ideal but not necessary for successful composting. Just remember to have a higher amount of carbon materials such as leaves or paper to high nitrogen materials such as grass clippings. Most fruit and vegetable scraps will break down very efficiently with their natural balance of carbon to nitrogen, making them ideal ingredients.

It's wise to contain your compost pile in a commercial or homemade bin. There are many commercial bins to choose from. Commercial bins that are insulated, dark in color and have a lid with ventilation, can help you control heat and moisture within the pile. Homemade compost bins are very easy to construct. Four stakes and wire with 2 inch or smaller openings will contain the majority of ingredients for the pile. Select an area for your compost bin that is level and somewhat out of the way and away from your home, if possible. Compost bins can be effective in full sun or shade as we have seen in our research. Selecting an attractive compost bin may encourage you to stay with the process and won't detract from the beauty of your landscape.

Two to three inches of compost can be added to vegetable gardens before tilling each season and mixed into the top foot of soil. Compost can also be mixed into planting holes with trees and shrubs. I have used one part compost with three parts soil with great success. A very thin layer (1/4 of an inch) of compost can also be spread over lawns in mid to late spring and again in the fall. You can also place compost in a burlap bag and place the bag in a dark container in the sun for two weeks or more. This process will make a rich compost tea that can be used to add nutrients to your lawn and garden plants.

As all of us tighten our belts with the increased cost of gas and food, it's wise to get the most out of each dollar we spend. Instead of discarding valuable plant nutrients in the garbage, recycle those nutrients back to your plants in the form of compost.

If you have questions or concerns about composting, be sure to attend one of our free seminars the EARTH Center in South Brunswick, NJ. Send me an email at Hlubik@aesop.rutgers.edu, if you would like to be added to our mailing list for educational programs. More information is available from our composting factsheets at: <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/subcategory.asp?cat=5&sub=36>.