

Fresh from the Farm Stand

You know it is summer when you see the signs along the side of the road announcing heirloom tomatoes, freshly picked strawberries, and corn on the cob. Some of the best food moments in July and August are my stops at farm stands, and my favorites are those on the roads to and from the Jersey shore. So, for this summer edition, I offer a variety of simple, but tasty ways for you to enjoy fruits and vegetables fresh from the farm stand.

Eggplant

The eggplant that you are most likely to find at a farm stand is the dark purple skinned, elongated oval variety. Yet, you may be fortunate enough to spot the white skinned, egg shaped variety, which is a real treasure. While the dark purple eggplant is one of my favorite vegetables, the white variety tends to be less bitter and makes for a more interesting conversation piece.

The simplest way to prepare eggplant is to grill slices after marinating in extra virgin olive oil and sea salt. First, slice the vegetable into rounds of about 1/6 to 1/4 inch thick. Place a layer of slices in a large baking dish and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and a healthy sprinkle of sea salt. Repeat with additional layers until all slices are topped with both oil and salt. The purpose of the salt is to extract the liquid that causes the eggplant's bitterness. Let the slices marinate for about one hour prior to grilling. Grill the eggplant on medium-low heat, turning the slices with tongs so that they soften and brown. This healthy and flavorful side dish and can be refrigerated to enjoy again.

Tomato

Whether you select hothouse or heirloom, this fruit is a symbol of summer. A go-to tomato salad that is sure to please is a Caprese Salad of sliced tomato and moz-

zarella garnished with fresh basil leaves. To add another tomato salad to your summer repertoire, try a Panzanella Salad.

To begin, cut half of a baguette into one inch cubes, and toast the cubes under a broiler until lightly browned. Also cut two large ripe tomatoes into one inch cubes, and cut a peeled and seeded cucumber into 1/4 inch slices. For additional flavor, slice half of a Vidalia onion, and combine the tomato, cucumber and onion in a large bowl. While some recipes call for adding peppers, I prefer to let the tomato shine. Add the bread cubes to the tomato, cucumber and onion mixture and season with sea salt, fresh ground pepper and about 1/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil.

The final touch is a chiffonade of basil, which you create by stacking 8 to 10 basil leaves, rolling and then cutting the stack with kitchen scissors to form long thin strips. Toss all ingredients together and let the salad rest in the refrigerator for at least 1/2 hour before serving so that the flavors combine to create a refreshing summer salad.

Corn

Summer would not be complete without sweet corn on the cob. Topped with a pat of butter, sea salt, and fresh ground pepper, corn on the cob is a treat. As an alternative to this standard preparation, try a gnocchi and corn brodo as a starter or main dish.

Shuck two ears of white sweet corn and then slice the corn from the cob. Sauté the corn for a minute or two in unsalted butter and extra virgin olive oil, and set aside while you bring a pot of chicken stock to a boil. When the stock comes to a boil, add the ricotta gnocchi. When the gnocchi float to the top, add the corn along with sea salt, fresh ground pepper and edible flowers, such as squash blossoms or day lilies.



Photo by Erin McNichol

Cherries, Strawberries, Raspberries and/or Blueberries

Pies, cobblers, or crumbles are probably the first desserts that come to mind to incorporate freshly picked cherries or berries. While I do enjoy these summertime desserts, crêpes allow for more creativity. In my view, the best sweet crêpe recipe is in Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Once you prepare your crêpes, top them with any or all of the above along with a drizzle of honey and a dollop of ricotta cheese.

Enjoy your farm stand finds this July and August! 🍷



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