



Eating Locally in Winter

by Sandy Cruz

Is it really possible to eat a local diet during Colorado's long, harsh winter and spring seasons? Yes — if we're willing to adjust our diets seasonally.

According to Ayurvedic physician John Douillard, a seasonal dietary cycle contributes to health. Dr. Douillard recommends an abundance of raw foods in spring and early summer, a high-carbohydrate diet from late summer into fall, and a high protein/high fat diet in winter. Perfect for locavores! The trick is to eat lots of what is locally available in any moment, and to work with Nature in planning ahead for lean times.

As gardeners, we can extend the annual growing season in spring and fall with floating row covers, cold frames and solar greenhouses. We can plant early vegetables like radishes and Chinese greens, and cold-hardy vegetables like kale and the late-season champion, Brussels sprouts. Fall-planted garlic and spinach will grow underground all winter, then pop up through the snow in early spring.

Rather than starting a garden from scratch every spring, we can plant perennial vegetables and fruits that jump into action as soon as days begin to warm. Of over 100 perennial vegetables, many will grow in Colorado, including chives, walking onions, rhubarb, sorrel, daylily, sunchoke, ostrich fern, watercress, asparagus, good king Henry, nettle, groundnut, arrowhead, chicory, Malabar spinach, spikenard, Chinese yam and linden tree. Although fruit crops are often wiped out by late spring frosts, numerous native and exotic berries — like strawberry, raspberry, chokecherry, serviceberry, honeyberry and sea buckthorn — thrive in our harsh Rocky Mountain climate. We can also augment plant foods by keeping chickens, goats, bees or fish.

We don't have to produce food in order to preserve it. With a keen eye and good timing, we can acquire seasonal local surplus by foraging, helping gardener friends, frequenting farmers markets, joining a CSA, gleaning fields or visiting farm stands.

Canning and freezing — the most popular preservation methods — are energy intensive, reduce nutrients and require lots of storage space. For simplicity, ease, quality and flavor, I dry just about everything. Taking advantage of the incredible heat in my car, I lay out shallow baskets of vegetables, sliced fruits, berries, culinary and medicinal herbs and mushrooms on the seats during the day. To prevent molding during a cloudy spell, it's important to have a backup system when solar drying. In bear country, be sure to take fruit inside at night!



Fermenting food — like pickled vegetables, sauerkraut and kimchee — is fun, simple and incredibly healthful. For centuries, people have also preserved food in oil, vinegar, salt, sugar, honey, alcohol, and as sweet/sour condiments.

Whole vegetables like potato, onion, garlic, winter squash, carrot, parsnip and beet store well in cool, dark conditions. Refrigerate nuts and seeds. Keep dried foods, including grains and beans, in a cool, dark, dry space. Be sure to use insect/rodent-proof containers, label everything with name and date, and rotate food by using the oldest first. Store honey in a warm spot, since it crystallizes more quickly below 57 degrees.

We can still produce some fresh food in winter. Container gardens on a sunny windowsill may include greens, herbs, Grandpa's home peppers, tomatoes and all kinds of sprouts. Oyster mushrooms can be grown in a bucket. Animals may continue to produce eggs and dairy. We can also get fresh food in winter from farmers who produce dairy, meat and mushrooms, as well as produce from winter CSA's and farmers' markets.

My current strategy is to accumulate as much local food as possible throughout the warm season from my garden, friends with surplus, wildcrafting, farmers markets and stands, local coops, etc. I mostly preserve by drying, and am experimenting with fermentation and other methods. I grow and dry berries, then combine them with (potentially local) oats, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and yoghurt for my breakfast muesli. I grow fresh greens, herbs, tomatoes and cherimoya in a solar greenhouse through the winter and spring. Although still highly supplemented, my food scenario is evolving towards sustainability over time.

Resources

The Permaculture Activist, quarterly journal and fantastic bookstore

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life, by Barbara Kingsolver

Perennial Vegetables, by Eric Toensmeier

**The Winter Harvest Handbook: Year-Round Vegetable Production
Using Deep-Organic Techniques and Unheated Greenhouses**,
by Eliot Coleman

Wild Fermentation: The Flavor, Nutrition and Craft of Live Foods,
by Sandor Ellix Katz

Keeping Food Fresh: Old World Techniques and Recipes,
by the Gardeners & Farmers of Terre Vivant

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