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Spring has sprung with April showers and farmers markets

Posted by: [The Michigan Citizen](#) Posted date: [April 28, 2013](#) In: [Fresh Ideas](#) | comment : 0

By **Kibibi Blount**

I love this season: waking up the garden, prepping beds, planting transplants and planning opening day for farmers market. Farmers markets are an important part of the landscape in the Detroit community because this is the place where you can find the freshest produce, breads, cheese, eggs and more. It's also the place where food assistance shoppers may optimize their shopping dollars. When making a purchase of \$20 or more, shoppers with Bridge Cards will have their dollars doubled through the Double Up Food Bucks program.

For example, if you spend \$20 on Michigan produce, you will receive \$40 in Double up Food Bucks, beginning July 1 through November 30. This is important information for food assistance shoppers because there are many farmers' markets around the city that are approved to offer Double Up Food Bucks. For a listing of these markets visit www.detroitmarkets.org or call the Fair Food Network at 734.213.3999 or you may call the Detroit Food Policy Council 313.833.0396.

Shopping at farmers markets is the easiest way to eat locally. You know where the food comes from. After all, the grower is right there and you can ask questions about the way in which the food is grown. For example, what chemicals, if any, are used, when was it harvested and how often are they at the market. You may also be able to pick up recipes and participate in cooking demonstrations. Keep in mind that foods are seasonal. So if you are looking for peaches in May, just know they did not grow in Michigan. Learn what grows in your area when and talk to the growers about upcoming produce. Markets tend to be less crowded when they open or just before they close. There are many exceptions to this, so try going to your market at different times to figure out the best time for you.

For the best selection, go to the farmers' market early. The best goods go first. Popular-but-limited items may even sell out before the day is done. For the best deals, go to the farmers' market late. Farmers and other vendors often prefer to discount their products instead of loading them back up to take home.

Keep in mind that farmers grow food for a living, however, so don't expect or ask for deep discounts. Some markets may have rules against end-of-the-day discounts. So don't be surprised if end of day discounts are not offered.

Be prepared to shop by bringing a re-useable shopping bag since the farmer may not have bags or have flimsy plastic bags. A backpack can make the hauling easier in many cases. Farmers can make change but purchases will go easier and faster if you have small bills, single dollars are preferred.

The best deals at farmers' markets are had when you buy in bulk. You'll enjoy the best flavors and the best prices when you buy a lot of whatever is at its harvest peak. This is a great time to learn how to preserve food for later use. There are also many classes held on freezing, canning and drying foods. This is an excellent way to enjoy seasonal foods through the year.

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You're buying ultra-fresh produce when you shop at the farmers market, so let its natural flavor show when you cook it. Keep preparations simple. You'll make cooking easier and you'll be likely to try (and eat) even more local foods from the farmers market next week.

Enjoy the farmers' market season and share your experience with others!

Kibibi Blount is the program coordinator for the Detroit Food Policy Council.

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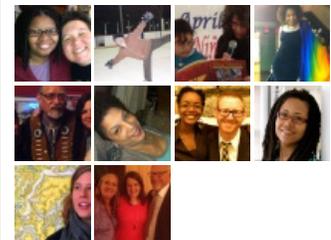
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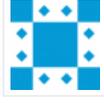
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