

## **Locavores Eat Fresh, Local Food**

### **by Vera Strader**

It wasn't long ago that virtually everyone ate locally-grown food. Today though we generally purchase our produce--grown in Chile, Guatemala, even China--while pushing our grocery carts down fluorescent-lit aisles.

A new trend is to become a locavore, someone who *chooses* to eat locally-grown food, though few are as dedicated as Barbara Kingsolver, author of the bestseller, "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle." Kingsolver describes her family's often amusing adventures while spending a year limiting their food to only that produced within 100 miles of their home.

There are an impressive number of benefits to eating locally. Food that has not travelled thousands of miles is fresher, tastier, and apt to be more nutritious.

Another compelling argument in favor of consuming locally-grown food is to keep our food dollars here at home. When businesses are not locally owned, money leaves the community with each and every transaction.

Locally-grown food benefits the environment as well. One study concluded that food grown and distributed through the conventional system (large, commercial farms and long-distance distribution) used 4 to 17 times more fuel while releasing 5 to 17 times more carbon dioxide during transit than did locally-grown products.

**GROW YOUR OWN.** There are several ways to eat locally, but you can't get more local than your own backyard. Growing your own can be a real money saver whether from vegetables grown in a patio tub or in a bevy of raised beds in the "way back."

Northern California garden writer, Rosalind Creasy, reports reaping a whopping 238 pounds of organically-grown food from her spring and summer garden. She sliced a four by 25 feet long (100 square feet) bed from her front lawn, amended the soil, and planted seedlings from the garden center. You can read about her project at [www.rosalindcreasy.com](http://www.rosalindcreasy.com).

Another perk of growing your own produce is that you know exactly what you're eating. You are in control of the kinds of pesticides (if any), fertilizers, and amendments used.

Gardening also offers emotional, physical, and mental benefits. "Playing in the dirt" can be stress reducing and the exercise and sunshine help build stronger bones. And, there is great satisfaction in sharing the result of your endeavors with friends, neighbors, and food pantries.

**JOIN A CSA.** Short for Community Supported Agriculture, a CSA is a farm which provides fresh, local produce to subscribing members. A CSA usually gives choices of types and amounts of food received and often includes eggs, meat, or seafood in addition to the fruits and vegetables grown on the farm.

CSAs take the work out of eating locally since deliveries may be provided as well. In Tuolumne County, Bald Mountain Farm and Red Earth Farm both provide “box-a-week” locally grown produce (information available at [www.farmsoftuolumnecounty.org](http://www.farmsoftuolumnecounty.org)). Outer Aisle Foods, located near Murphys, delivers weekly to Tuolumne and Calaveras counties in the summer and every other week in the winter.

CSA members enjoy seasonal vegetables sometimes different from those they would purchase in the local grocery. Cooking hints and recipes are often provided as well.

**BE A FARMERS’ MARKET AND TAILGATE SHOPPER.** You also keep your money close to home while purchasing at farmers’ markets and roadside and tailgate stands. You can ask questions of these vendors to find where and how their products are grown.

You will find vine and tree-ripened crops though perhaps not as pretty or uniform as those in supermarkets. Organically-grown products may sport a blemish or occasional worm that is of little consequence to flavor and nutrition. Look for bargains for canning or freezing.

Given today’s luxurious abundance of food choices, a gradual transition to more local eating works best for many, perhaps growing your first sun-warmed tomato or learning to cook a new vegetable.

Be sure to encourage markets and restaurants that support our local farmers. The food we eat can be no better than the ingredients we start with.

*Vera Strader is an enthusiastic vegetable gardener and frequents local produce markets.*