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**FOOD CO-OP**

# Co-op Community NEWS

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# When Will We See LOCAL PRODUCE?

Photo by Joanne Placy

Habiba Sial, Cordata Co-op Produce Assistant Manager

*The sun is peeking through the clouds, the days are getting longer, and you may ask yourself, where is all the local produce? From member surveys and conversations with Co-op shoppers, we know that many of you are interested in purchasing local produce whenever it is in season. Here in Whatcom County, summer and fall are the most abundant times for local fruits and vegetables.*

It is interesting to note that our local growing season is somewhat short. According to the Let's Grow Veggies website ([letsgrowveggies.com/washington/98225/frost\\_dates](http://letsgrowveggies.com/washington/98225/frost_dates)), our approximate last frost date in the Bellingham area is May 10. That leaves home gardeners and farmers roughly 150 frost-free days before freezing temperatures arrive again in late September. With a short growing season, we depend on the rains and the sun equally to provide us with an abundant harvest which begins in June and July and continues to its peak in mid-September, right before the first frost.

The Co-op is proud that we buy produce directly from farms in Whatcom County as well as elsewhere in Washington state. For crops that thrive in Eastern Washington's climate, we have direct buying relationships with various organic orchards that supply us with cherries, apples, and pears. From Whatcom County, we buy directly from a number of farms, many of whose names you will recognize

from shopping at the Co-op: Hopewell Farms, The Growing Garden, Highwater Farm, Terra Verde, Dominion Organics, Rabbit Fields Farm, Broad-Leaf Farm, Cedarville Farm, Sunseed Farm, Moondance Farm, and Spring Frog Farm at Holistic Homestead, just to name a few.

In spite of our short growing season, we enjoy a variety of high quality, delicious produce items that are vigorous and abundant in our climate. Over this harvest season, keep an eye on the Co-op's produce departments' changing selection of seasonal items.

Early season veggie crops start to trickle into the Co-op's produce departments' as early as May. These items include quick-growing cool-season crops like arugula, mustard greens, radishes, and bunches of fresh herbs. As the season progresses into mid-July, start looking for longer-harvest veggies such as kales, chards, lettuces, and broccoli. Although these longer-season vegetables become available later, their harvest season lasts longer, often into

early October. For example, Hopewell Farm's delectable carrots make their way on to our shelves in late July, but are hardly enough to stay with us through the fall and into winter. Some years we get to enjoy those crisp sweet carrots all the way into the New Year.

Many seasonal items, like berries, peas, and even corn, are best enjoyed in abundance when available locally. These delicious taste-of-the-season crops have a narrow harvest window and are often only available locally for three to six weeks, depending on the specific weather conditions of each year's growing season. Strawberries have a notoriously short and fickle harvest window ranging from mid-June to early July. Raspberries are more reliable, starting in mid-July followed by blueberries in early August. Start looking for corn in late August and eat as much as you can until it slows down in late September.

The local produce season reaches its peak in September. In that blissful window of local produce perfection before the first frost hits, more items are ripe for harvest simultaneously than any other time of year. Although you won't find any local strawberries or sugar snap peas at the Co-op in September, you will find raspberries, blueberries, apples, peaches, pears, plums, and tomatoes. In the vegetable arena, enjoy summer squashes, basil, cucumbers, beans, chards, kales, lettuces, onions, potatoes, garlic, hot peppers, sweet peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbages, and the first of the winter squashes. In September, both Co-ops' produce departments are bursting with fresh, local abundance.

The fruit selection begins to narrow in late September as the berries and stone fruits begin to drop off, but the apple season more than makes up for it. Early transparent apples like Gravensteins, Golden Delicious, and Ginger Golds find their way to the Co-op first, followed quickly by Galas, Honeycrisps, and Sonatas. A bit later, in early October, apples like Pink Ladies, Braeburns, and Fujis come rolling in along with a wide variety of unique heirloom apples. The Co-ops are also briefly revisited by the same short cool-season crops that we started off the season enjoying—the local tender greens like arugula, mustards, radishes, and herbs. Vegetables that store well like potatoes, onions, and winter squashes, combined with frost-hardy greens, keep locavores well fed through the late fall and early winter.

To make the most of the local season, enjoy all the produce our unique growing region has to offer while it is ripe and ready to eat. As each delicious crop comes into season, plan meals around what is available for that week or month. Many people also like to can, freeze, and preserve our local harvest to be able to continue enjoying it into the cold winter months.

If you're wondering if something is local, take a look at our produce signs to find out. All of our produce signs indicate a place of origin and local items are marked accordingly. If you want a recommendation or have any questions about any of the local items we carry in the produce department, feel free to ask any of our friendly produce stockers or submit a customer comment.