

AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Summer 2009 / Week 5 of 13

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Planned harvest: Melons (assorted), Armenian Cucumber, Spaghetti Squash, Tomatoes (double share, mix of Homestead, Roma, Cherry, Lemon Boy and Better Girl), Eggplants (Ichiban or Black Beauty), Verdolagas and Corn (Elote Blanco).

Loco for Local! As a part of a nation-wide campaign of food coops, the Food Conspiracy Co-op in Tucson is organizing the 2nd Annual “Eat Local, America!” Challenge, running from July 5 to July 20. The goal of the challenge is to encourage people to seek out locally grown or produced foods, and thus think where their food comes from and to engage with farmers and the community. This week I spoke to Torey Ligon, outreach coordinator at the Tucson Food Coop, who is also a member of Crooked Sky Farms’ Tucson CSA. Torey says that there are many benefits to eating locally: first, it supports local agriculture. This is especially important in Southern Arizona where family farms have almost disappeared. Eating locally helps support the local economy and preserve local knowledge, and encourages small-scale sustainable growing practices that benefit the land, ecosystem and communities, and could be crucial in the event of a food or distribution crisis. Also, it allows for a better connection between growers and producers on one end and consumers on the other, thus allowing for a higher degree of accountability. Second, local foods are usually more nutritious. The nutritional value of foods depends on the soil and growing and harvesting practices; however, small farmers are generally very dedicated to keeping their soil healthy. Third, freshness and taste: vegetables and fruit are harvested when ripened on the plant, and reach you in a day or two. Fourth, local foods have a potentially lower environmental impact. This issue has generated a great deal of controversy lately, however once we take into account that any food in Ajo, except what we can grow in our backyard or the Community Garden, must come from somewhere else, calculating your carbon footprint should not only take into account the miles to the farm but also the farmer’s consumption of water and gas.

So what is “local,” and what is local in Ajo? The meaning of local is a matter of debate, and people have used various criteria. Some people try to eat within a 100-mile radius. In his book *Coming Home To Eat*, Gary Nabhan drew a 250-mile circle around his home near Tucson. Some local food eaters have begun to define local food by the area’s foodshed instead of a set distance in miles. Our foodshed in Southern Arizona may include Phoenix, Tucson, parts of Mexico, and even areas in Southern California. You can also include items that are produced in Southern Arizona as local goods even if some of the ingredients have been imported from other parts of the country, since locally produced bread or tortillas, for example, benefit the community and the environment in many of the same ways that locally grown foods do.



Tucson Food Outreach Coordinator Torey Ligon

If you are considering taking the challenge, Torey says that it’s important to pick a goal that is manageable and just slightly challenging. If you are just beginning to dip your toes into eating locally, try incorporating one local ingredient into each meal, or perhaps make one local dish for each meal. If you are a seasoned locavore (and being a CSA member naturally pushes you in that direction), aim higher: perhaps one complete local meal a day, one fully local day a week... And remember, eating locally should be fun, so don’t hesitate to adjust your goal if you need to.

Torey also shared some of her tips for eating locally. First, plan your week – “Out of convenience, everyone is eating things they otherwise might not be eating,” she says, so you have to plan ahead. Take a look at what’s available, what comes in your CSA share or what you buy at the farmers markets, and then plan your weekly meals accordingly. It also helps to cook things in advance, so that you have food ready when you come home from work. Second, look for recipes on line – several search engines, such as on allrecipes.com, allow you to select for the ingredients you have at hand. This lets you get out of your normal cooking routine and explore different tastes and preparation techniques. Third, connect with your friends who are also trying to eat more locally. You can share resources, compare notes, and perhaps even prepare a meal together. Our weekly pick-up session provides a good forum for that as well!

Regardless of whether you commit to a personal goal by signing up with the Food Coop in Tucson on-line or not, this is a great opportunity to pay more attention to your consumer and eating habits. The Tucson Food Coop will host a series of events during that time and will offer a wide array of local foods (<http://www.foodconspiracy.org/>). When visiting regular stores or restaurants, ask what’s local, thus encouraging them to source more local foods. The Ajo CSA Farm Stand will continue supply extra produce to satisfy your locavore cravings, and a local foods demonstration will be held during the pick-up next Friday. ¡Viva la comida local!

RECIPES ETC.

Honeydew Melon Salad

(adapted from wapt.com)

What to do with a melon that might not be as sweet as we like them – broil it! This changes the both the flavor and texture, making this a salad that will pleasantly surprise your guests.

1 tsp honey (or agave syrup)
1 tsp + 1 Tbsp fresh lime juice
2 pinches of salt, divided
Four 1 ½-inch-thick honeydew melon wedges, peeled
1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
2 cups stemmed arugula leaves or fresh baby spinach
Dash of freshly ground pepper

Position the oven broiler rack about 5 inches from the heating element. Preheat the broiler. In a small bowl, whisk together the honey, 1 teaspoon of the lime juice, and a pinch of salt. Place the melon wedges, concave side up, on a foil-lined jelly-roll pan. Use a basting brush to coat the tops of the melon wedges with the honey mixture. Stir together the remaining lime juice, the olive oil, and the remaining pinch of salt in a medium bowl. Add the arugula and toss. Spread a layer on each of 4 salad plates. Broil the melon wedges for 3 minutes, or until warm. To serve, arrange the warm melon wedges atop the arugula; sprinkle lightly with pepper. If you wish, drizzle about 3 tablespoons of the raspberry sauce around the arugula on each plate. Serve immediately while warm.

Spicy Cucumber Salad

(from Veg News)

3 tablespoons lime juice
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon sugar
1 clove garlic, minced
2 tablespoons mint, roughly chopped
1 teaspoon jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced
2 large cucumbers, peeled, sliced lengthwise, seeded, and thinly sliced
1/4 cup dry-roasted peanuts, chopped

In small bowl, mix lime juice, soy sauce, sugar, garlic, mint, and jalapeño. Add cucumber slices and peanuts, toss gently, and serve

Verdolaga or purslane is a plant native to the Americas that is harvested when it is young and used as an herb for seasoning, as a fresh green to be served in salads, or sautéed or cooked into soups. Though mostly known as an invasive weed here in the States, purslane leaves have succulent, fleshy leaves and stems with a delicate and tangy flavor, and its mild and nutritious characteristics are valued by many cultures. In addition to amaranth, it is the only green we can count on during the summer here in Arizona. It has above average values of vitamins A and C, low caloric value and potentially healthful omega-3 fatty acids. In the old days, purslane was eaten as treatment for arthritis, inflammation and heart disease and to promote general good health. You can use your purslane raw, as an herb for seasoning, or as fresh green to be served in salads (with tomatoes, cucumbers or potatoes) and sandwiches or tacos. Or simply sprinkle the leaves generously with coarse sea salt, lemon juice and olive oil and serve with fish, grills, or omelets. If you wish, you can cook it like any greens (with onions, or garlic, chiles, and lemon), but you might want to take care not to overcook it since it has a tendency to go gelatinous. You can also add chopped purslane to your favorite spaghetti sauce, frittatas and soups.

Nina's Melon Cucumber Salad with Mint

4 cups melon, cut into 1 inch pieces (substitute watermelon, if you wish)
2 cups cucumber, de-seeded, cut into ½ inch cubes
2 Tbsp lime or lemon juice
2 Tbsp olive oil
salt to taste
½ cup fresh mint, finely chopped

Put melon and cucumber pieces in a big bowl; in a separate bowl whisk together lime juice, olive oil and a pinch of salt; you can also do that in a glass jar with a lid – just shake it well! Pour over the melons and cucumbers, add the mint and mix gently. Let cool at least for an hour before serving.