



Winter Bounty

Farmers' markets offer the Seacoast local goods year-round

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE

“There is nothing quite like a frost-tinged carrot,” says Sara Zoë Patterson, coordinator of Seacoast Eat Local, an organization dedicated to promoting local food sources. “The cold changes its character, making it very sweet.”

The root vegetable isn't the only thing undergoing a character change during the winter months. Farmers' markets, once emblematic of summer, are now popping up as the snow falls, surfacing in greenhouses, school basements, and town halls. Plucked from the earth in late fall and staying crisp in root cellars for months, carrots are one of dozens of vegetables that make up the winter farmers' market bounty.

Seacoast Eat Local organizes winter farmers' markets in Exeter and Rollinsford and helps promote several others throughout the area, including those in Biddeford and York, Maine, and Salem and Derry, New Hampshire. As more markets open each winter and growers become hip to the possibilities, Patterson observes, “we have had to turn farmers away.”

Savoring the Seasons

Perhaps a better name would be winter-spring markets, as they're still going strong when crocuses first appear. Starting in November and stretching through April, scores of farmers from throughout the Seacoast and beyond hawk their produce, meats, eggs, dairy items, and herbs. “Luxuriating in seasonable foods is a really exciting way to eat,” Patterson says. “It's a real joy because the taste of those vegetables in season is so amazing and gratifying.”

You can appreciate the changes in what's offered as the months progress from late fall to winter solstice to early spring. “January and February are very exciting at these farmers' markets,” says Patterson, who likens the one in Rollinsford to a European market. “The light is starting to come back and the greens that farmers have planted—new growth, not only spinach, but broccoli rabe, mustard greens, things like cilantro—are amazing.”

The variety of meats at these markets is another reason to stop by. Elk from Velvet Pastures Elk Ranch in Lee, New Hampshire, and sausage made with porchetta, fennel, brown sugar, and rosemary from Popper's Sausage Kitchen in Dover are a carnivore's dream. Venison, lamb, goat, and rabbit are also available.



Clockwise from top right:
Hollister Family Farm, Lee, N.H., Riverside
Farm, North Berwick, Maine, Brookford Farm,
Rollinsford, N.H., Farmer Dave's, Dracut,
Mass., Borealis Breads, Wells, Maine,
Red Manse Farm, Loudon, N.H.



Cooking demo from
Erin Ehlers, market manager
for Seacoast Eat Local

Selected Seacoast Winter Markets

Check the websites for exact dates and times of each market.

Exeter Winter Farmers' Market

Exeter High School
1 Blue Hawk Drive
Exeter, N.H.
seacoasteatlocal.org

Newmarket Winter Farmers' Market

Carpenter's Olde English Greenhouse
220 South Main Street
Newmarket, N.H.
localharvest.org/newmarket-farmers-market-M28473

Newburyport Winter Farmers' Market

The Tannery Marketplace
50 Water Street
Newburyport, Mass.
thenewburyportfarmersmarket.org

Rollinsford Winter Farmers' Market

Wentworth Greenhouses
141 Rollins Road
Rollinsford, N.H.
seacoasteatlocal.org

In addition to the farmers' produce, the markets feature several local vendors offering both prepared foods (baked goods, condiments, sandwiches) and nonfood items like crafts and soaps. At the Wentworth Greenhouses in Rollinsford and at Exeter High School in Exeter, Patterson notes, "our vendors have been pushing themselves to use local ingredients. If you buy a chicken pot pie and chicken salad sandwich, it will be made from local chicken. It's a challenge to push yourself to eat a more seasonable diet, but this shows how very possible it is to make these decisions if you want to."

Beyond Meat and Potatoes

A visit to one of the winter markets is more than a shopping trip—it's fun and entertaining. At Carpenter's Olde English Greenhouse in Newmarket, a vacant greenhouse turns into fresh-produce central on alternating Saturdays from November through April. Shiitake mushrooms from Barrington, New Hampshire, and potatoes, beets, and garlic from Wild Miller Gardens in Lee are not just a mirage on a cold January morn. Rounding out the treat quotient are pies, cookies, and scones from Sweet Melissa's Kitchen in Madbury. Add bluegrass music, coffee, and gourmet sandwiches from Big Bean Café in Newmarket, and you've got a dynamically delicious day out.

This market, now in its fourth year, has started to attract a new crop of fresh-food fanatics, which pleases grower and market contact Rob Carpenter, whose greenhouse specializes in floral arrangements. "I love seeing the younger generation, the 25-year-olds walking through," he says.

So does Shari Wilkinson, who runs the Newburyport Winter Farmers' Market. The 20-plus vendors sell duck, T-bone steaks, chard, Portuguese cabbage, mustard greens, and flavored butters in a heated covered tent space in the Tannery Marketplace, with local musicians creating an eclectic soundtrack. "It's great music. There are children running around. You are supporting local food and making new friends," says Wilkinson.

From guacamole demonstrations to knife sharpening, the freeform market has become an incubator for small businesses. But at its core, it's farm focused. All farms are within a 70-mile radius, and Wilkinson can attest to their local bona fides. "I visit each to make sure they are selling what they grow. I police them pretty hard," she says.

Chef's Choice

Noteworthy chefs like Mary Reilly of Enzo Restaurant & Bar in Newburyport have come to rely on the year-round supply of local goods. Located in the Tannery, Enzo is right there for the winter cornucopia every other Sunday. All Reilly has to do is walk out her eatery door and kale, spinach, winter squash, and mint are at her fingertips, displayed on tables in the heated tent. "I'll wander out there with a notebook and pen. I do a circuit, find out what's available. After the first pass a menu will come to mind," says Reilly, who visits the market weekly in the summer.

Having a farmers' market right outside her door was "a happy coincidence," Reilly adds, and she takes full advantage of the seasonal harvest. The farm-to-plate chef offers a three-course meal with her market finds every other Sunday during the winter months. Dishes like butternut squash-filled cappellacci with sautéed leeks, apples,

and maple brown butter sauce taste even sweeter when you know the ingredients were sourced that morning.

Mutual Benefit

The demand for local food has been a boon for growers. Many farms in the Seacoast area have started to grow produce year-round, and depend on the community to help them thrive. "It's a symbiotic experience," Patterson says. "The farmers are being supported by the community. It's essential to the continuing growth of small-scale farms." To grow vegetables year-round and participate in the markets, many farmers have built hoop houses and plastic tunnels over rows of planted vegetables to keep the ground from freezing.

As purveyors on the Seacoast and across New England look for ways to stay viable all year, winter farmers' markets have become a godsend. "To make your living as a farmer, you need a multipronged approach," says Andre Cantelmo of Heron Pond Farm in South Hampton, New Hampshire. That means offering a winter Community-Supported Agriculture option (aka, CSA, in which individuals purchase shares of a farmer's yields and receive periodic produce boxes in season), keeping the farm stand open when it's below freezing, and participating in as many winter markets as possible. "They are incredibly important. They've given us the capacity to be a viable business in New England," says Cantelmo.

With less competition from other farmers' markets in the winter, Cantelmo actually does better financially this time of year. Starting out as a potato farm, Heron Pond Farm now offers wheat berries, garlic, kale, radishes, shallots, arugula, apples, and more in the winter. "Our goal has become to provide a local food opportunity to our clientele 12 months a year," he says. "As we've gotten to do that, we've gotten better at growing food."

Buying potatoes, kale, and bok choy directly from regional farmers offers benefits beyond what goes on your plate. "In a way it's giving back to the land," says Patterson. "I think we have a lot of ability to change the world as human beings and shape it into what we want it to be," By doing something as simple as shopping at a farmers' market in the winter, you are improving the soil and water quality by keeping farms in business, she explains. "These farmers are taking care of our environment. They are stewards of the land."





Heron Pond Farm

Recipes

French Onion Soup

Makes 6 servings

Wine: Chateau Tour de Mirambeau Blanc 2009 (Bordeaux, France)

Beer: Redhook Copperhook (Woodinville, Wash., and Portsmouth, N.H.)

This is a great winter dinner in a bowl, made with caramelized

onions simmered in broth, and topped with a baguette slice and melted cheese. Be generous with the cheese topping. Gruyère is classic, but seek out a sharp, hard local cheese.

Adapted from Erin Ehlers, market manager for Seacoast Eat Local.

- ¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter
- 2 pounds onions, halved and sliced thinly
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 teaspoons all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup dry white wine
- 4 cups beef broth
- 1½ cups water
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 6 (½ inch-thick) slices baguette or other crusty bread
- ½ cup shredded Parmesan cheese, or to taste
- ½ cup shredded Gruyère (or a local hard cheese), or to taste

Selected Vendors

Dozens of vendors participate in Seacoast winter farmers' markets. Here's a small list to show the variety of goods available.

BAKED GOODS and PREPARED FOODS

Borealis Breads

Wells, Maine
borealisbreads.com
 Breads using Maine-grown grains

Figtree Kitchen

Rollinsford, N.H.
facebook.com/figtreecafeandcatering
 Baked goods, salads, soups, sandwiches

Seacoast Butters

Amesbury, Mass.
seacoastbutters.com
 Flavored organic butters

Valicenti Organico

Hollis, N.H.
gimmiespaghetti.com
 Seasonal ravioli, fresh pasta, arugula pesto

BEVERAGES

Red Rover Coffee Roasting

Newmarket, N.H.
redrovercoffee.com
 Fresh roasted coffees

Sweet Baby Vineyard

Kensington, N.H.
sweetbabyvineyard.com
 Grape wines; local fruit wines

White Heron Tea

Rollinsford, N.H.
whiteherontea.com
 Organic tea, seasonal prepared foods

DAIRY

Brookford Farm

Rollinsford, N.H.
brookfordfarm.com
 Cheese, cultured butter, free-range eggs

Hickory Nut Farm

Lee, N.H.
hickorynutfarm.com
 Goat milk cheese, fudge, yogurt, soap

MEAT, POULTRY, SEAFOOD

Bonnie Brae Farms

Plymouth, N.H.
bonniebraefarms.com
 Venison steaks, roasts, burgers, sausages

New Roots Farm

Newmarket, N.H.
newrootsfarm.com
 Pastured pork, grass-fed lamb and beef, roasting chickens

Popper's Artisanal Meats

Dover, N.H.
poppersmeats.com
 Sausage and charcuterie from local meats

Velvet Pastures Elk Ranch

Lee, N.H.
velvetpastures.com
 Free-range elk meat

Yankee Fisherman's Co-Op

Seabrook, N.H.
yankeefish.com
 Fresh fish, lobster, scallops, shrimp

PRODUCE

Applecrest Farm

Hampton Falls, N.H.
applecrest.com

Farmer Dave's

Dracut, Mass.
farmerdaves.net

Heron Pond Farm

S. Hampton, N.H.
heronpondfarm.com

Hollister Family Farm

Lee, N.H.; *facebook.com/thehollisterfamilyfarm*

Red Manse Farm

Loudon, N.H.
redmansefarm.com

Riverside Farm

N. Berwick, Maine
riversidefarmstand.com

Wild Miller Gardens at

Tuckaway Farm
 Lee, N.H.
wildmillergardens.com

1. Melt butter in a large pot over medium heat. Add onions, thyme, and bay leaves, and cook, stirring frequently, until onions are softened and caramelized, about 40 minutes.
2. Add flour and stir for 1 minute. Stir in wine and cook for 2 minutes. Stir in broth, water, salt and pepper and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, 30 minutes. Remove bay leaves.
3. Toast bread slices. Ladle soup into broiler-proof bowls. Place toasted bread on top, then sprinkle with shredded Parmesan and Gruyère cheeses to cover the bread and surface of the soup. Put under broiler to melt cheese. Serve and savor immediately.

Shallot Vinaigrette

Makes about ¾ cup dressing

Shallots are a classic ingredient used in French cooking. They have the flavor of onions but are milder, with less of a bite, which makes them great for salads. This dressing is also good drizzled over steamed kale.

Adapted from Erin Ehlers, market manager for Seacoast Eat Local.

- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine or balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 large shallot
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ¾ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Combine ingredients in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Use immediately, or store, refrigerated, in an airtight container.

Smoky Onion Relish

Makes 4 servings

Chipotle peppers are smoked, dried jalapeños, which gives the relish some heat. For added smokiness, use smoked paprika. Serve this dish with any kind of roast meat or poultry.

Adapted from Erin Ehlers, market manager for Seacoast Eat Local.

- 2 medium onions, halved and very thinly sliced
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon paprika, smoked or regular
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon chipotle pepper

Toss onion slices with remaining ingredients and allow flavors to blend for 30 minutes before serving. May be made in advance and stored, refrigerated, for several days. **T**



For for a recipe for Pasta with Kale and Pancetta, go to tasteoftheseacoast.com.



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