

## Eating Local Food

Eating locally grown and gathered food is an old idea made new again. In the past both renowned chefs and all good cooks knew that the fresher the ingredient, the better the result. Most of us who learned to cook at home, learned first how to choose those foods that were worthy of the effort. Nutritionists told us that fresh fruit and vegetables retained more vitamins. In fact, all foods lose nutritive value as the time from harvest increases.

But then food distribution systems changed and the "food industry" began to develop fruits and vegetables that held up to traveling long distances or maintained a "fresh look" for many days. This met the needs of the supermarket more than those of the consumer. In the kitchen and on the palate as well as in the nutritionist's office, fresh still means--recently harvested.

But now another societal factor has emerged. It no longer seems like a good economic (or political) plan to use expensive fossil fuels to "ship" foods across country or an ocean when much of it could be produced locally. On the Eastern Shore, it seems particularly wasteful to have supermarkets with seafood offerings that were caught or raised in Indonesia. Talk about "carrying coals to Newcastle"!

Eating locally also means eating more of a particular product during its natural growing season. Eat more strawberries when they are being picked in your area; later on enjoy the jellies and jams. This is not a new idea but one that has its roots in history. Scott and Helen Nearing in their landmark book of a generation ago talked about eating New England foods as they grew. Scott Nearing thought you should eat something fresh from the soil every day (he lived to be 100). I think the premise was that people were first hunter/ gatherers, and that the human digestive system developed to accommodate seasonal variety. For example, springtime wild ramps (leeks) were thought to be a healthful purge after the long winter months (they are also delicious). Here on the Shore we still have many wonderful foods free for the gathering (e.g., puffball mushrooms, wild asparagus, numerous creatures from the sea and so on. Seasoned in the South, a recent cookbook from Bill Smith, a renowned North Carolina restaurateur, also embodies the philosophy of eating local and seasonally-limited fare.

For those of us who grow a kitchen garden, or are lucky enough to have a fisherman or hunter in the house, there may be very little time indeed between the harvest and the table. The outdoor and farmers markets have already begun to sell locally grown plants (from saved seeds) for the kitchen gardener, as well as garden flowers, locally produced jams and jellies (from last year's harvests) and lettuces and greens of all types.

The following is a somewhat non-traditional, but nevertheless very tasty way to make collards (a green available seasonally on the Eastern Shore).

2 cups water	2 tsp tamari
1/4 cup diced onion	1/4 tsp cumin
1 bay leaf	1 tsp honey
1/2 tsp allspice	4 cups chopped fresh collard greens
1/2 tsp minced fresh garlic	1 Tbs olive oil
1 Tbs Worcestershire sauce.	Salt, black pepper & cayenne to taste

In medium pot, combine water, onion, bay leaf, allspice, garlic, Worcestershire sauce, tamari, cumin and honey. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes. Add collard greens and simmer covered until greens are tender, about 30 minutes.

Remove pot from heat, cool slightly, remove bay leaf and stir in oil. Add salt, pepper and cayenne. Serve hot. (Vegetarian Times, March, 1999).

We are lucky indeed to live on the Eastern Shore where fresh produce and food from the sea have always been a tradition. Support your local farmers and watermen. Ask where your food has come from. And come join us, The Local Food Project, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of each month at 7:15 pm on the ESCS campus.