

Consuming Thoughts

by
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There was a time when it was possible to tell the season by the menu...such as apple pie in the fall, strawberry shortcake in June, and fryer chicken in the spring. Nowadays, the miracles of farm production, processing, packaging, and super-fast transportation have all but erased seasons as far as foods are concerned.

Foods still have seasons of heaviest supply even though they might be available most of the year. Now is the season for asparagus, artichokes, various kinds of greens, rhubarb and pineapple.

These seasonal products are all at or near peak supply this month, but consumers need to take advantage of asparagus now because its season is very short. California asparagus production arrives on the market first followed by New Jersey in late April and early May. About one-third of the yearly crop is sold in April.

Rain and stormy weather have hampered growth and harvesting in many California producing areas. As a result quality and prices are variable and you'll see prices will fall as shipments

increase. Also look for locally grown asparagus.

You'll want to look for top quality asparagus which has firm, brittle, bright green stalks and tightly-closed, well-formed heads that are purplish-green in color. If the tips or heads are feathered, the asparagus is past its prime. Thick stalks will be more tender than thin, spindly ones.

April brings peaking supplies of fresh pineapples. Flavor as well as color will be different for pineapples from different countries. Mexico and Puerto Rico are the principle sources for our pineapple, although a few from Hawaii find their way to eastern markets.

Depending on variety, pineapples vary in color from red to green to yellow. They will change color at room temperature.

Select one with a rich, sweet fragrant aroma. If the temperature is too low the fragrance may be hard to detect. You might try thumping the fruit. If the pineapple sounds

hollow it is immature. So choose one with the dullest thud.

Color is not an accurate guide to selecting, neither is pulling a crown leaf and thumping takes a lot of practice, so your best bet is to let your nose guide you.

Artichokes — the gourmet's delight from the central coast of California is easy to cook, fun to eat and delicious! Artichokes are a go-anywhere, be-anything food, from a simple snack to an elegant entree.

When to buy: you'll find artichokes in most markets year round. The peak season is in the spring — March, April and May. November through February it's winter kissed time — artichokes touched by frost and colored bronze to brown on the outer leaves. These are premier artichokes — tender and tasty.

How to buy: choose artichokes that are heavy for their size, compact and firm in the winter and spring; somewhat flared and conical in the summer and fall. Artichokes come in sizes baby to jumbo and all are mature. Any size may be boiled or steamed. Small artichokes are better for sauteing, stews, marinating and casseroles. Medium sizes are great for salads and snacks...the largest for stuffing and main dishes.

Cottage Industry

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generations," LaVerne explains. "And, we also think of them as works of art."

A German lady with two-year-old twins is one of her fastest knitters. "She sits on a high stool in the middle of the twins' playroom where she can keep an eye on them," LaVerne said.

Another lady in her 70s can turn out several sweaters a month.

Last year, more than 500 pounds of wool was used by the Knit-Design Studio. All of it came from sheep raised in the Danville area. "Some of the local farmers are willing to trade their wool for knitted wool socks for the family," LaVerne said.

The wool is also washed, carded, and spun into yarn locally.

Orders are by word of mouth or through an ad placed in Yankee Magazine. LaVerne is presently looking for other outlets for marketing and will have a mail-order brochure ready by fall.

The entrepreneur also does

some of her own knitting and has several weaving and knitting machines in the large sunny room she uses for her studio. Prior to setting up her own business, she traveled about New England demonstrating knitting machines for the White Company.

When she isn't overseeing her home knitters, LaVerne is teaching a knitting class at nearby Bucknell University. "You can't imagine the satisfaction I get from teaching students to knit," she beams. "It is such a delight to see the expression on the face of someone who has just completed her first handmade sweater."

LaVerne and her husband have three children, ages 13, 10, and 2. They also have several Haflinger horses and a "just learning" Border collie.

For anyone wishing more information from LaVerne, she can be reached at Whispering Oaks Farm, RD 1, Box 160-D, Danville, PA 17821.

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