

# Farmers' Markets

*Grass roots goodness beyond the grocery*

Summer is coming, and the Chicago farmers' market season is about to burst onto the scene as our town squares and dormant parking lots come to life with "tent cities" popping up all across our area. You can't miss their colorful booths, rusty tractor-trailers, and folding tables brimming with fresh products and plenty of mid-western pride.

Savvy consumers flock to our open-air markets from mid-May through October to provide their family and friends with some of the area's freshest and most unique products available. Many people shop at farmers' markets not simply because it's the trendy thing to do, but because they feel there is no substitute for treasured organics and natural breads. As for me, I appreciate the grass roots appeal of supporting local vendors and benefiting from the satisfaction of knowing where my food actually comes from.

## The treasure hunt

If you haven't shopped a farmers' market, you owe it to yourself to stop by and give it a try. Where else can you find one-pound, vine-ripened heirloom tomatoes or fresh beets with moist clay still clinging to them from the morning harvest? Be on the lookout for assortments that range

from apples from Wisconsin to zucchini from the rural farms of McHenry County. Products can vary by market or even from week to week due to the weather, so be flexible during your exploration into the opportunistic market environments – you never know what you might discover, especially if you shop when you're hungry!

I savor every farmers' market experience because it connects me with fond childhood memories. How many of us can recall the honor of being appointed to hand-select 10 ears of corn or the perfect melon from hundreds displayed in the bed of a truck? Give your kids the same thrill and empower them to shop, making memories that will last a lifetime (and oh, by the way, they can carry the goods for you as well!).

My Achilles heel is sniffing out the tents offering boutique cheeses from the rural dairies across Wisconsin. I can smell potent blue cheese a mile away, and it isn't long before I have combined it with a fresh baguette from a nearby vendor to complete a quick snack and another successful market journey. To me, this is the original fast food – second to none!

## Community pride

Our summer markets and the small army of mer-



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chants and volunteers who make them possible can nourish the community – and our souls – if we choose to support them. Some of us would be lost without our favorite markets' key dates written in bold on our calendars, because after all, they reign as the consummate place for neighbors to shop, catch up with old friends, and relax together while making plans for dinner and treasured snacks – some that never make it home.

I look forward to volunteering at our local Barrington farmers' market because it makes me feel like an integral part of the community. I can't wait to visit with the new crop of kids stopping by my tent to see what's cooking or to taste something for

*Mary Rose's Best*

## Grilled Plums with Mascarpone Topping

(SERVES 8)

### Ingredients:

- Extra virgin olive oil
- 4 firm plums (pitted and quartered)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 cup room-temperature mascarpone cheese or cream cheese
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup whipping cream (whipped to soft peaks)

### Cooking Instructions

Blend the mascarpone (or cream cheese) and vanilla together in a small bowl, then fold in the whipped cream and set aside. In a separate bowl, stir the sugar and lemon juice together and set aside. Using medium-high heat, place the plums (brushed with olive oil) on a lightly oiled grill pan and grill each side for about two to three minutes until slightly softened and heated thoroughly. (Don't move them or you won't have the signature grill marks.) Place grilled plums in the bowl with the sugar mixture and toss to cover them evenly. Divide the plums into eight dishes and serve with a generous portion of whipped topping.

