



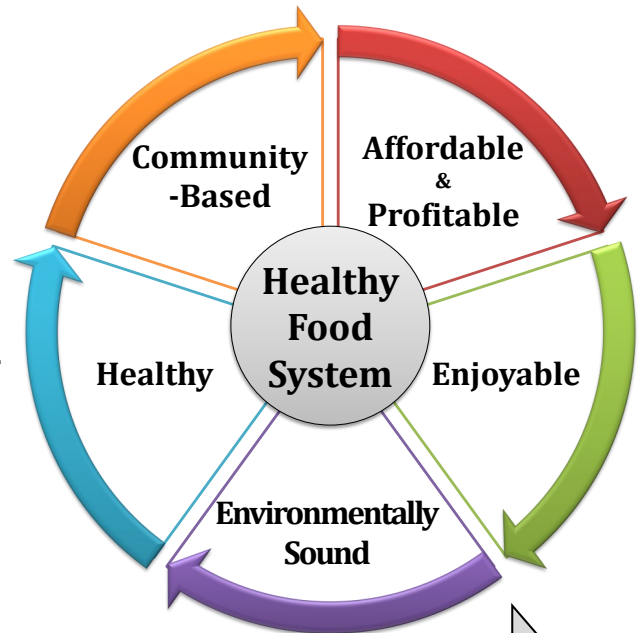
# Extending the Local Food Season

*Eating healthy and local beyond the growing season.*

Those who don't live in California often dream of **extending the growing season**—with row covers or even expensive, propane-heated greenhouses. Yet what we really need is to extend the **local food season** year-round—in ways that preserve your health, the environment, and your wallet—as part of a healthy food system.

## DO IT YOURSELF!—FIRST STEPS:

- Eat fruits and vegetables in season.
- Freeze green beans, spinach, and broccoli.
- Dehydrate apples, tomatoes, and bell peppers.
- Can tomatoes, jams, and pickles.
- Store carrots in your refrigerator.
- Store garlic, onions, and winter squash in a closet.
- Use local corn, beans, and grains year-round.
- Grow your own sprouts.

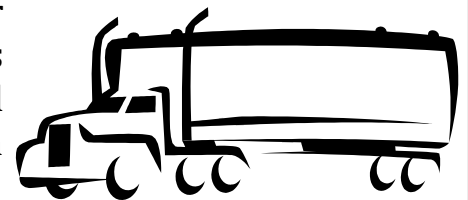


*Learn more on the next page!*

## WHY EAT LOCAL?

Relying on local foods can reduce impacts on our environment and make us less vulnerable in the face of rising energy costs, an uncertain economy, and a changing climate.

Nutrient loss begins right after harvest. Many fresh vegetables shipped long distances have lost as many or more nutrients as local ones canned or frozen soon after harvest!



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## D.I.Y. DETAILS

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**Buy local, in bulk, in season.** Get good food when it is in season, buying larger amounts to preserve or store yourself. Garlic and onions can be stored in a cool, dry place in your house; carrots and cabbage store well in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator; and many fruits and vegetables can be canned, frozen, or dried.

**Eat seasonally!** Savor fresh fruits and vegetables when they are in season and preserve them for year-round enjoyment. Try to buy less of those foods that must be shipped long distances to get to you. Your wallet and the environment will thank you.

**Some foods like the cold shoulder.** Green beans, spinach, and broccoli are best frozen, losing texture and color if canned. Both the preparation (blanching) and freezing results in some nutrient loss, but it is comparable to that in out-of-season, trucked-in produce. Fruits freeze well without blanching, but also can be canned or dehydrated.



**Keep your freezer full and keep your freezer outside this winter.** You may already know that full freezers are more energy efficient than half-filled ones (the mass of the frozen contents helps regulate the temperature better than empty air), but did you know you can cut the energy use of a freezer by keeping it in an unheated garage during the winter?



**Try drying.** Simple electric dehydrators can help you preserve your local bounty, but watch for new developments on safer, more effective solar drying! Apples are easy to dry, but other fruits like peaches and pears are great, too. Make “sunless” sundried tomatoes and enjoy the flavor of summer anytime.

**Dry vegetables intended for winter soups and stews.** Why freeze green beans, bell peppers, or zucchini for soups and stews? Dehydrate vegetables and let the water in the soup or stew rehydrate them for you. Dried vegetables require no energy for storage, unlike frozen vegetables.

**Can high-sugar or high-acid foods like jams, tomatoes, and pickles.** By canning only those items that can be done using the water bath method, you cut down on the equipment needed for canning. A big stock pot can be used for water bath canning, avoiding the need for a pressure cooker. It may help reduce your utility bills, too, as research shows canning is less energy intensive than freezing.



## D.I.Y. DETAILS CONTINUED...



**Introduce yourself to cold storage with your refrigerator.** Store food that likes cold, humid storage in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator. Carrots, cabbage, and beets will keep in the refrigerator for several months if correctly stored and monitored!

**Stock up on garlic, onions, and winter squash.** Take advantage of fall harvest and store your bounty in a cool, dry, dark place, like a closet. Winter squash like warmer temperatures than onions and garlic, so consider storing squash in a cool, unused bedroom. As with any cold storage method, monitor your stored produce for any signs of spoilage.



**Get healthy with local corn, beans, grains, and flours at any time of year.** Stored in a cool, dry place, they can be purchased in bulk and are a great way to eat local year-round.

**Get into winter food production with sprouts.** Growing your own sprouts is a great way to add fresh microgreens to your diet during the winter. From salads to stir-fries, sprouts are versatile and nutritious additions to your diet.

## WAYS TO SAVE ENERGY, MONEY, & RESOURCES

**It isn't just about food miles.** There are food miles, external costs, and a whole slew of other factors when considering the transportation of food...it can get complicated. Here are a few good rules of thumb:

- When you can't buy local, buy regionally—within 500 miles, as a rule of thumb.
- Reduce the number of shopping trips—buy more at a time, less often.
- Resist the urge to buy out-of-season produce; it has usually been transported a long distance (and time).

**Take recycling into consideration with food preservation.** Canning jars can be reused numerous times. Used canning lids, no longer suitable for canning, can be used to seal jars of dried or frozen food. Ziploc bags are handy for freezing, but usually suffer damage during storage and cannot be reused for food. Recycled cottage cheese or yogurt containers are handy for freezing, but try to close them as tightly as possible to retain food quality. Take these factors into consideration when choosing a preservation method and try to reuse or recycle containers.



**Don't throw away your food scraps.** Save your food scraps, especially the large amounts generated during canning or other preservation, for a compost bin or give them to chickens or pigs. Don't have either? If your neighbors do, check and see if they would welcome the scraps. You might even get some free eggs in return!



## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Information is always changing, and we are continually looking to expand and improve our tools, methods, and publications. For instance:

- Solar dehydrators show promise as a very sustainable food preservation method, but more research and design development is needed to ensure safe and effective results.
- Our informal energy use tests on home dehydrating are below existing industrial research figures, implying even electric dehydrating may more efficient than documented.

## NEXT STEPS

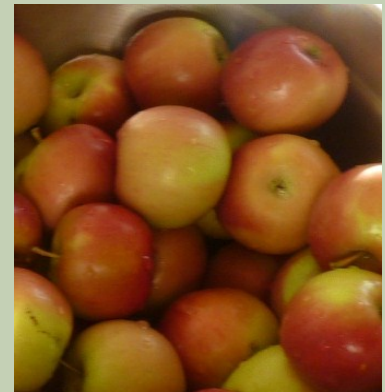
### Explore cold storage methods:

Store produce in an insulated but ventilated container (such as a cooler) in an unheated garage.

Try in-garden or mound storage.

Wall off and insulate a corner of your basement for cold storage.

Store produce in a neighbor's cold cellar.



### Grow hardy greens year-round:

Build an unheated cold frame out of used storm windows and grow greens through the winter.

Extend the harvest season of root crops and hardy greens with straw or mulch.

GET MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON  
THESE STEPS AND MORE ONLINE



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find online resources for this tool, as well as additional tool booklets on other community food topics, under "Food System Tools" at [www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org](http://www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org) or [www.HCFS.org](http://www.HCFS.org)



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KELSEY REEDER, MAR 2011