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Contact: Tiiu Poder for Eyking Farms
Phone: 902.867-1521
Email: tpoder@entre-net.org

EATING HEALTHY AND LOCAL AFTER THE HARVEST

Local foods have taken prominence in our collective culinary psyche as we gain more insight into the origins of our food. But now with our prime growing season drawing to a close, Nova Scotians are asking how we can remain committed to local producers and yet still enjoy delicious and nutritious cuisine?

Some of the best vegetables for shelf life are potatoes, rutabagas/turnip, beets, parsnips, garlic, onions, carrots, sweet potatoes/yams, and cabbage. While it may not seem an exotic selection, chefs, nutritionists and other culinary experts are creating new recipes that are as satisfying to our taste buds as any dish made of far flung produce from South America, Mexico, Australia and Asia.

In addition to taste, the nutritional benefits of locally grown produce far outweigh that of vegetables that have been prematurely harvested to accommodate long shipping times over thousands of miles of travel. Just think tomatoes and asparagus from the garden versus the winter supermarket varieties. There is simply no comparison on taste.

Eating local is opening up our kitchens to creative new ways to prepare winter staples such as cabbage. Presently a head of cabbage in Korea is selling for more than \$10.00! A poor harvest and hoarding have led to such unprecedented prices that Koreans are willing to pay because of cabbage's almost religious status in a culture that includes a fermented cabbage dish called kimchi in their daily cuisine.

In contrast Canadians often see cabbage as a lowly vegetable mostly served in cole slaw. Europeans have a different perception of this cruciferous vegetable. Residents of Brittany would be lost without cabbage that is rich in fibre, vitamins C, A, E and B as well as potassium. Some of the best restaurants in France serve cabbage with lobster and in rustic peasant soups. Germans adore their sweet and sour red cabbage and in the mountains of Italy, cabbage is baked in a traditional melee of potatoes, buckwheat noodles and cheese.

Sauerkraut, another version of fermented cabbage, is a masterpiece of Russian and Polish cuisine. A recent study by the University of New Mexico supports evidence

that a diet rich in sauerkraut may stave off breast cancer. While the vitamins in cabbage help boost the immune system, fermented cabbage also contains lactic acid that has multiple benefits for the stomach and pancreas. The lactic acid in fermented cabbage provides high levels of iron and sulphur that work in part as cleansing agents for the digestive system and in doing so can ward off harmful bacteria and parasites. This assists the pancreas by secreting essential digestive enzymes into the stomach. In addition to myriad nutritional benefits, cabbage is an excellent food for weight loss with only fifteen calories in one cup.

In Canada cabbage has a relatively long growing season – it's often not harvested until after the first frost which farmers believe actually enhances its flavour and texture. Over the winter, the leaves compress and turn white, but lose none of their nutrition. One of the main growers of cabbage locally is Eyking Farms in Millville, Cape Breton. Much of their produce is found at food retailers across Nova Scotia including Sobeys, who are making an effort to support local growers. Recently Eyking Farms launched their first website that was designed to inform consumers of the benefits of their locally grown produce. As well as nutritional information, the website provides a wide variety of innovative and traditional recipes that will help readers make the most of their local produce in and out of season. See www.eykingfarms.ca

By being brave and creative with our treatment of cabbage not only are we eating delicious local food but we're making sure we optimize our health. Stay tuned for more on fabulous local food.



Cabbages growing on the shores of the Bras D'Or Lakes

