



## Farm-style Fast Food

If the growing season has you too busy to prepare well-planned meals every night, follow these tips for healthy “fast-food” eating

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Summertime garden abundance ushers in a sense of irony for us hobby farmers: The time of year when we are up to our ears in fresh, tasty, nutritious produce is also the busiest season when our garden- and farm-chore lists run long.

To paraphrase Charles Dickens, summer oddly ranks the “best of times and worst of times” for farmers. We’re surrounded by fresh produce, but we don’t have time to cook it.

If you take the same approach to summer eating as you do in your garden—have a plan and be prepared—you can eat well all season long.

Just as you plot in early spring how many rows of potatoes to plant, thoughtful planning for what you’re going to eat that day (and week) ensures healthier dining. Such planning doesn’t need to take much time or effort, yet it goes a long way to take advantage of peak summer flavors.

Need another reason to eat healthy during the busy growing season? Caring for your body enables you to keep up with the physical demands of farm life.

“When summer chores peak in demand on one’s body, farmers need to prioritize taking care of themselves, particularly remembering to make healthy food choices,” advises Angie Tagtow, an environmental nutritionist based in Iowa and a leading advocate championing public access to fresh, affordable, sustainably raised food. “Develop an eating plan that works for you, keeping nourished while taking advantage of the healthy bounty in your garden.”

Take the Boy Scout approach to eating this season: Be prepared and have a plan. Here are some tips to get you started:

## Eat Fresh and Simple

Identify what will be in abundance in the garden each week, and plan your main meals around those items. It sounds like basic advice, but this can be a key variable in eating healthy during the peak summer season.



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“Fresh foods contain the highest nutrient value,” says Tagtow. “No matter what form of food preservation you use, from freezing to canning, nothing beats the nutritional power punch in local produce harvested from your own garden.” (Read other farmers' tips about eating fresh foods.)

Sundays can be a good day to plot your fresh-eating plan for the week, taking advantage of the slower weekend before Monday’s busyness kicks in.

What will need harvesting and what are you in the mood to eat? Focus on showcasing the robust flavors of ripe produce, and you’ll find you don’t need to spend much time in the kitchen. Save the complicated casseroles and soufflés for the winter months when you have more time to relish something slow-simmering on the stove.

“Most of my family’s summertime meals are quite simple and take little time to prepare,” says Deb Eschmeyer, an Ohio farmer who raises the bulk of her produce needs in her own garden. “From fresh greens to a perfectly ripe tomato, garden-fresh flavors often taste best simply on their own.”

To make a more complicated dish, use Sunday afternoon and cook a double batch so you’ll have leftovers throughout the week.

My husband, John, is our family’s pesto maker. He’ll make a big batch, harvesting two 5-gallon buckets of basil. He’ll pluck the leaves, wash them and then prepare a pesto batch, freezing some and setting aside a sealed container to use as a sandwich spread or on top of noodles—easy, flavorful and nutritious to eat throughout the week.

Sometimes I get into “squirrel mode” and focus on packing food away and preserving the harvest instead of enjoying the fresh bounty when it’s available.

For example, we have about two weeks on our Wisconsin farm when the strawberry patch goes crazy. I get so busy freezing and making jam that I forget to satisfy my fresh-berry cravings. Some of these precious produce items, like strawberries, arrive for only a brief visit; I need to remember to take full advantage and use this time to make fresh strawberry pancakes, strawberries and cream, and strawberry and rhubarb pie.

#### Add Protein

Think of protein as fuel for your muscles. When we wake up sore after a day of power weeding, we vividly appreciate the important role muscles play in running our farms.

“Remember to add protein to your meals to provide necessary nutrients for your muscles,” says Tagtow. “While most of our summer eating comes direct from our garden, protein may be the item you purchase and add to your meals, such as cheese, nuts, meats, yogurt and tofu.”



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You can add protein to your meal by tossing nuts into a salad, adding cheese slices on top of fresh tomato wedges and serving crunchy pea pods with a yogurt dip.

### Eat Breakfast

For generations, mothers have been nagging kids to eat something to start the day, and there's a sound nutritional reason for that. Breakfast serves as our "fuel for the day," and should include a combination of complex carbohydrates, protein and fat to provide balanced nutrition while slowing down digestion, enabling you to feel full longer.

Choose breads made with whole grains since these have more fiber and nutrients than items made from white, refined, processed flour.

Eliminate those 10 o'clock hunger pangs when you eat a well-planned breakfast, such as:

Carb: fresh fruit

Protein: yogurt

Fat: granola

Carb: whole-wheat toast

Protein and fat: peanut butter

Carb: whole-wheat tortilla

Protein and fat: scrambled egg and shredded cheese

### Plan for Snacks

However you slice it, farmers need extra snacks to get through a busy summer day. Think of a snack as an extra energy boost—a mother lode of nutrients to fuel you until the next meal.

Planning ahead makes all the difference between having healthy fuel options or falling into the dark side of snacking, grabbing whatever processed, refined item is lying around the kitchen.

Aim for carbohydrates and protein combinations in your snacks, tapping into that same idea for breakfast. Homemade trail mix is a great snack option and can easily be made ahead of time and stored in the pantry for later.

Commercial, pre-made trail mix often uses additives and preservatives.



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A healthy combination of good fiber and good fats, homemade trail mix can be tailored to your preference and tastes. Try dehydrating some fruit from this year's garden; strawberries work well. (Try the Farmer Fuel Trail Mix for a great snack.)

### Drink Water

You remember to water the garden. Don't forget to keep yourself hydrated, too.

Continue drinking water throughout the day, especially when you're working outside in the hot sun. Use a stainless-steel or aluminum water bottle. These eliminate bottle waste; millions of plastic bottles end up in landfills annually. Take a small cooler of water bottles to the field with you, and you'll have easy access to refreshing, cold water just as the mercury peaks.

Avoid drinking water directly from the garden hose. "As the hose sits outside and bakes in the sun, toxins can leach out from the hose into the water," explains Tagtow. "Keep it safe, and use a water bottle filled with kitchen tap water."

Another healthy water tip: Remember to test your well water annually to ensure safe drinking water.

Focusing on healthy summer eating celebrates the heart of farm life: Caring for the land while still caring for yourself add up to the magical "good life" we came to the farm to find. Enjoy the season, with a little planning and protein on the side.

### Fast-food Farmer Tips

Savor some seasoned advice on fast, healthy, summertime eating from fellow farmer friends

Check out what these farmers say about eating fresh and local:

"In the summer, I eat as simply as possible and don't spend much time assembling meals. Just about every day, we eat some form of a fresh vegetable sauté, varying vegetables based on what's in season.

"I sauté chopped onions and garlic in one tablespoon of butter or oil in a cast-iron pan, then add anything from beans to beets, seasoning with fresh herbs such as basil and thyme. At the same time, I'll cook up some buckwheat, which is surprisingly easy to make and highly nutritious. Lastly, I'll add in some protein such as tofu, nuts or black beans, and I have a hearty meal ready in about 20 minutes.

"If I have any leftovers from the sauté, I often put it in the blender the next day with a little milk for a quick soup."





—Marguerite Ramlow, Artha Sustainable Living Center, Wisconsin

“Harvesting from my garden right before we eat enables me to whip up a 5-star meal in 15 minutes. Nothing beats the fresh flavors when you harvest immediately.

"My husband and I will eat fresh salads two times a day. We make pesto on weekends and use that for hearty, flavorful grilled sandwiches throughout the week.

"One of my favorites uses fresh eggplant: I first marinate thin slices of eggplant in a homemade vinaigrette dressing. I then spread the pesto on bread slices, add tomatoes, mixed greens, the eggplant and a little melting cheese and grill till warm. We eat this several times a week and can't get enough of it when eggplant is in season.”

—Deb Eschmeyer, Harvest Sun Farm, Ohio

“Farming with my mother and sister, we each often grab a meal at different times, depending on our schedules.

"One thing I've found makes an easy, quick meal is to cook up a big batch of dried beans and then scoop individual-sized portions into greased muffin tins. I place the whole tray in the freezer and then pop out each bean portion and place it in a freezer bag.

"I can then easily take one bean portion at a time and heat it up for a perfectly sized individual burrito. Add in some tomatoes, veggies, lettuce and cheese, and I have a fast, healthy, hearty meal.”

—Zoë Bradbury, Groundswell Farm, Oregon

“With four hungry boys to feed and my in-laws, who live on the farm across the road, often stopping by for supper, I focus on simple, lighter fare during the summer.

"We have a lot of picnics, which both adds a fun, festive twist to the meal and simplifies clean-up. If one of my boys makes a mess, it's food for the birds! We raise our own meat, and my husband, Brian, loves to grill, so we'll often grill a lot at once and eat the leftovers during the week.

“Eating fresh needs to sometimes be balanced with the realities of busy family lives and crazy schedules. Sometimes, my schedule needs turn to peanut butter and jelly, and that's OK. I try to make sure it's the better of the store-bought stuff: organic peanut butter with no hydrogenated oil, our own homemade strawberry jam and bread made in the bread machine with a dash of healthy extras like wheat germ.”

—Jodi Bubenzer, Sunflower Hill Farm, Wisconsin

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For more ideas to make your summertime fast-food routine healthful, check out these cookbooks:

- \* Recipes From Edible Earth: Savoring the Good Life with Vegetarian Recipes From Inn Serendipity, by Lisa Kivirist and John Ivanko (Paradigm Press, 2008)
- \* Everyday Greens: Home Cooking From Greens, the Celebrated Vegetarian Restaurant, by Annie Sommerville (Scribner, 2003)
- \* From Asparagus to Zucchini: A Guide to Cooking Farm-fresh, Seasonal Produce, by the Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition (Jones Books, 2004)
- \* Simply in Season, by Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert (Herald Press, 2005)
- \* Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland, by Lucia Watson and Beth Dooley (University of Minnesota Press, 2004)
- \* Cooking with Heirlooms, by Karen Keb Acevedo (BowTie Press, 2007)



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