

Tips & Tricks for CSA Success

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE FOR CSA MEMBERS



VEGGIE EXIT STRATEGIES

HOW TO HANDLE
YOUR EXCESS
PRODUCE & AVOID
FOOD WASTE

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

ESSENTIAL KITCHEN
TOOLS THAT WILL
SET YOU UP FOR
SUCCESS

STORAGE TIPS

HOW TO MAXIMIZE
SHELF LIFE &
PRIORITIZE YOUR
MEAL PLANNING

CSA can be hard, but it doesn't have to be.

If you are a first time CSA member or early in your CSA journey, you might not realize just what you have gotten yourself into.

CSA and supporting local farms is incredibly fun and rewarding, but cooking with fresh food and bringing a constant supply of fresh vegetables into your home every week can be overwhelming at times. In fact, you should know that the average CSA member says it takes them about 2-3 years to feel like they're getting it down.

We know that what you really need is a guide that helps you understand how to efficiently deal with the bounty so you can feel good about what you are feeding your family.

Throughout this e-book you will learn tips, tricks and strategies gleaned from our CSA Master members to help you shorten the learning curve of CSA. Armed with this knowledge, you'll better understand how to prioritize your menu plan, deal with the overwhelm, and put any excess produce away for long-term storage -- so you can feel confident this CSA season!

Ready?... Let's dive in.

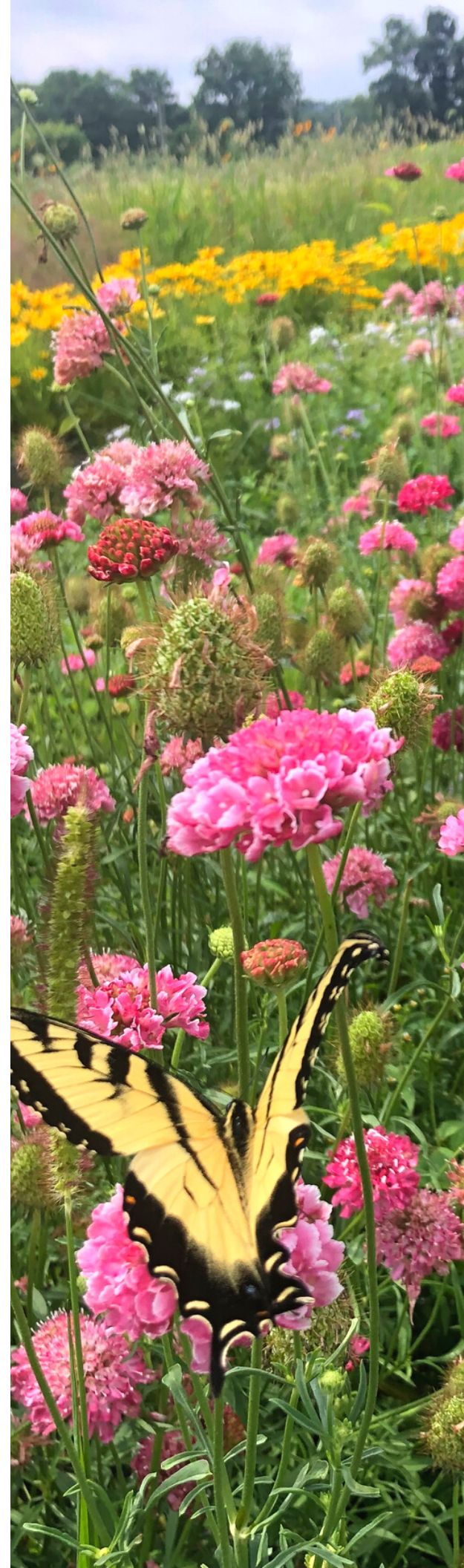




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Picking up your share

When the CSA begins, you may be unsure of what to expect at pickup. Don't worry! We make it very easy!

PARK. First park your car on the silo side of the street, unless you are handicapped or in need of curbside pickup (in which case you will park by the handicap parking sign, which is in front of the middle garage bay). Pickup is anytime between 1-7pm, on your assigned pickup day, unless you have pre-requested a switch to a different pickup day (by email, by Friday at 7pm of the week prior to when you wish to switch).

CHECK IN and get your share! You will see a green "runway" leading to the distribution room, Line up and check in. You will be given a crate containing your vegetable share, any share "add-ons" you may have purchased, and instructions for any pick-your-own crops that week.



Picking up your share (cont.)

UNPACK. Take your share crate back to your car to unpack and load it into your own bags, starting with the heaviest items and ending with the most delicate. Bag up any veggies in pulp containers (like potatoes) and leave the empty pulp container at the farm, or use for pick-your-owns if instructed to do so. Keep your veggies cool by bringing a cooler with some ice packs to load your veggies into, or place the veggies in a shady spot by your car if you are heading out for PYO crops. Locking them up in a hot car will shorten their lifespan and will cause spoiling.

RETURN your crate to the pallet in the parking lot- (please do not leave the farm with the crate- we need them all for the next pickup day).

PYO (pick-your-own) crops, when available. Follow the arrows out to the fields for any PYO crops. Bring your own clippers, as well as your modified gallon plastic water jug, for flower picking in the summer months.



How to *pick-your-own* FLOWERS



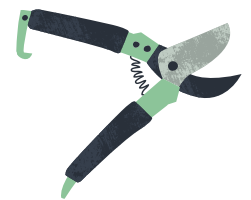
1. Make your farm picking vessel.

Take a gallon plastic container (from water, milk, juice, laundry detergent, etc.) and cut the mouth wider, but cut above the handle so it's still functional. Stem length and quantity is determined by this vessel, so please purchase a gallon water jug if you don't have one- glass vessels are not permitted on the farm. Keep your vessel very clean.



2. Bring your own pruners/clippers.

Regular household scissors are not sufficient. Do not try to rip flower stems off without pruners. The farm has pruners available for sale but for insurance reasons is unable to lend them out. Keep your pruners clean.



3. Fill your vessel with water at the farm.

The spigot is at the end of the gravel path, by the large chalkboard wall. Fill your vessel with a few inches of water before you go out to the field. You will want to cut flowers directly into the water.



4. Cut flowers above a bud or new growth on the stem.

DO NOT cut at the base of the plant or you will kill the flower. Cut above new growth, so as to allow lower buds to bloom for a later harvest. Stem length should be @ 12 inches (or less), approx. the length of your gallon plastic jug container.



6. At home:

Strip off leaves that will fall below the water line and recut stems at an angle. Make sure your vase is very clean, and full of cool, clean water. Keep your bouquet out of heat & direct sunlight. Change water every few days and keep an eye on the water level.

HOMEMADE PRESERVATIVE:

- Vinegar & Sugar: 2 Tbs white vinegar, 2 Tbs sugar, 1 QT water
- Lemon Lime Soda: One part Lemon-Lime Soda (Not Diet- the flowers need the sugar) to equal parts water.
- Exceptions: tulips and daffodils do not like sugar

CSA Member FAQs

1

WHAT IF GO ON VACATION?

One option is to “Share your Share” with a friend. Have someone else pick up your share while you are gone; no need to tell us in advance. Another option is to change your pickup day from a Tuesday to a Thursday or vice versa. Half shares may switch from A to B week or vice versa. ****Just let us know by email by 7pm Friday the week before you wish to switch.** Because we harvest a precise number of shares each harvest day, and communicate early with our partner farms for any share add-ons, we cannot typically accommodate last minute switches.

2

WHAT IF I FORGET TO PICKUP?

We have partnered with Rolling Harvest Food Rescue. They collect donated produce from local farms and distribute immediately to the non-profit hunger-relief agencies helping the most needy families in our community. If you have not made prior arrangements for someone to pick up for you, or to switch pick up days, at our discretion, some or all of any unclaimed shares will then be donated to Rolling Harvest. We do not have the cooler space to hold shares for pickup at a later date. In the case of emergencies, if you notify us the evening of your missed pickup (by email) we will do our best to accommodate your request.

3

WHAT IS THE SHARING BASKET?

Swap it out! The Sharing Basket is a place to put things from the share that you may not want. You can then take something from the basket that another member has left behind.



Join the CSA Facebook Group

Join our virtual community of foodies! If you feel stumped by a veggie in your share, you can and should reach out to our CSA private Facebook community. Our hope is that with over 350 members, it will become a supportive community as well as a source of knowledge for learning how to eat the food we grow.

Here are just a few things you can do in our CSA Member Facebook group:

1 WATCH THE WEEKLY UNBOXING VIDEO

Each Tuesday evening our CSA Coach Stephanie Borzio appears to do a live video “unboxing” from her kitchen. You'll learn what each vegetable is, how to store it, and get ideas for what to make with it.

2 ASK A QUESTION OF THE GROUP

We all bring a wealth of skill sets to the community- from veteran CSA members to newbies, likely someone will have an answer.

3 SHARE YOUR RECIPES & WINS

Tell us what's working for you so we can all learn and grow!

4 PARTICIPATE IN CHALLENGES

During the season, we do lots of fun contest and challenges that are designed to help you practice new skills in your kitchen.





Store things properly

We talk a lot about storage throughout the CSA season. You'll see it in the storage guide we give you before the season begins. We will mention it in our weekly emails as well as our weekly "Unpacking the CSA Share" videos. There's a reason for this. Proper storage of vegetables is essential. If you store things properly, they last longer, and you don't have to rush to use them. Many vegetables can last 1-3 weeks based on the quality of storage. And that means less food waste.



Storage Tips

1

CUT THE EDIBLE GREENS FROM THINGS LIKE CARROTS, BEETS, KOHLRABI, AND RADISHES

You will likely want to save these edible greens but when you store them together the greens will drain moisture from the roots. Remove the greens and store separately from the roots.

2

BAG IT UP!

Storing vegetables loose in the fridge is easy and uses less plastic, but isn't actually great for long-term storage. You should store most of your veggies (especially your greens!) in plastic bags in the fridge after you get home. Wash the bags and re-use them.

3

STORE IT LIKE A FLOWER

Some items are best stored in a glass of water like a flower. Green onions, basil, and cilantro will all last longer stored this way. Change out the water periodically. And store at room temperature.

4

REMOVE RUBBERBANDS OR TWISTIE TIES FOR BETTER CIRCULATION

5

WASH ONLY WHAT YOU PLAN TO USE RIGHT AWAY

Avoid excess moisture and humidity on your produce which can hasten spoilage. Wrap greens in a dry paper towel if necessary.

6

READ THE FARM EMAIL! USE IT TO SET PRIORITIES

Our CSA email will let you know what's coming up in the share that week, and will be chock full of useful information, including storage tips and recipe suggestions.

It's a good idea to take some time to read through that email each week and mentally (or literally) sort all of the veggies based on what will expire fastest. This way you'll know what you should prioritize cooking first and what can wait.

7

STORE FRUITS & VEGETABLES SEPARATELY

Whether you have a fruit share or are purchasing your own fruit, keep them separate from your veggies. The ethylene gas given off by fruit can cause faster spoiling in your vegetables.

8

POST A STORAGE CHEATSHEET ON THE SIDE OF YOUR FRIDGE

Though our newsletter is a great resource, as is our A to Z Vegetable Storage Guide PDF, you won't always want to go look it up. Having a one-page veggie storage guide posted somewhere easy to see will save you time during busy weeks.





Practice micro- prepping on CSA day & throughout the week

A lot of CSA members begin prepping veggies right away the night they bring home their CSA share. They find that certain techniques like cutting the carrots, slicing the cucumbers, radishes, or sweet peppers right away not only makes life easier, but also leads to their families grabbing veggies as snacks throughout the week.

We call these "micro-prep" moments and they are a huge way to stay on top of your produce and not get bogged down by the knife work inherent in cooking with lots of veggies.



Invest in the right kitchen tools

Like any activity, cooking isn't very fun without the proper equipment. Here is a list of the kitchen items we use most for cooking up our veggies.

1

A GOOD KNIFE (PREFERABLY A CHEF'S KNIFE THAT IS CONSISTENTLY SHARPENED)

Food prep is so much faster and safer when you spend the money for a high quality knife. To find the best knife for you, it's best to go to a kitchen store and try them out by hand. It's all about how it feels in your hand.

2

SHEET PANS OR BAKING SHEETS

When you join a CSA, one of the exit strategies you learn about is "the Sheet Pan Meal." This allows you to throw your entire meal (meat, veggie, starch) onto one sheet pan, and prep a meal in 30-45 minutes in one place. The sheet pan also comes in handy to help you freeze clumps of blanched greens or berries. They're also great for making fruit leather, or oven roasted tomatoes.

The sheet pan should have a lip and be large enough to handle large portions of food. Make sure it can fit in your freezer.

3

A CAST-IRON SKILLET OR OTHER PAN THAT CAN GO FROM STOVETOP TO OVEN

4

REFRIGERATOR STORAGE CONTAINERS OR BAGS

Try Debbie Meyer green bags: these reusable claim to absorb ethylene gas and lengthen the lifespan of your veggies. Or use stackable containers. An organizational system is a must.

5

A VEGETABLE PEELER

This is a multi-purpose tool every home cook should have-- and spend the extra \$5 to get one that has a nice handle that feels comfortable in your hand. You will use this not only to peel veggies, but also to shave vegetables for salads.

6

FOOD PROCESSOR

Use it for making salsa, pesto, pizza dough, and pureeing items like soups and sauces. It's even a great tool for shredding carrots or cauliflower "rice."

7

ICE CUBE TRAYS

These little guys help you freeze things like DIY veggie broth, pesto cubes, blanched spinach or kale, and more! Silicone ones are very useful, come in larger sizes, and are convenient to remove the frozen cubes.

8

SALAD SPINNER

An essential tool for washing and drying greens effectively and efficiently so they last longer.



9

FREEZER BAGS

Use for freezing your excess produce. You can blanch your greens and freeze them on a sheet pan; then pop them in a freezer bag to save until later. Some things can be “flash frozen” (just pop them right into a Ziplock bag without pre-cooking) -- for example peppers, garlic, tomatoes, and onions.

10

MASON JARS

These are a great storage tool for not only meal prep, but if you're going to learn to can veggies, or learn how to ferment (so easy!), you'll also need these. Some CSA masters use these to store their frozen veggies. You can also use them for making Mason Jar salads – a great lunch meal for on-the-go.

11

LARGE STOCK POT

You'll use this for soups and stews as well as to make regular batches of DIY veggie stock – a great way to use your carrot peels, tops, and other veggie scraps. Also great for canning.

12

SPLURGE ITEM: HIGH END BLENDER

Offers some more versatility in the kitchen, a higher end blender makes quick work of green smoothies, sauces and soups. You could almost get away with no food processor or just a small one, if you have a great blender. Vitamix is a top brand and we've had ours for years.

**YOU CAN FIND EVEN MORE SUGGESTIONS IN
OUR ESSENTIAL KITCHEN TOOLS GUIDE**

www.bloominglenfarm.com/hub



Learn how to identify your veggies



It can be hard to unpack things properly or store it correctly if you have no idea what the heck it is.

The Monday farm email will contain a list of the share contents for that week, with detailed information, tips and recipes.

On Tuesday afternoon we will post a photo of the share on Facebook where each veggie is labeled with text directly on the photo so you can easily identify your veggies.

Get (and stay) inspired

One of the most rewarding (and fun!) parts of being in a CSA is trying out new vegetables and new recipes! CSA is a great excuse to experiment with new techniques, and an amazing way to get more variety into your diet.

So don't just stick to old stand by recipes when there's a whole world of cooking to explore. Stay inspired throughout the CSA season! We suggest you:

1

CHECK OUT OUR BLOG- EVERY WEEK WE POST A UNIQUE RECIPE FROM THAT WEEK'S SHARE CONTENTS. SEARCH BY INGREDIENT IN OUR ARCHIVED RECIPES.

2

FIND A FEW FAVORITE BLOGS & WEBSITES THAT USE A LOT OF FRESH, SEASONAL PRODUCE & HEAD THERE FOR INSPIRATION.

3

REFERENCE OUR PRIVATE FACEBOOK GROUP TO SEE WHAT YOUR FELLOW CSA "FARM-ILY" IS MAKING FOR DINNER



Our favorite cookbooks & food blogs

COOKBOOKS

Six Seasons by Joshua McFadden

Bounty from the Box by Mi Ae Lipe

Simply in Season by Mary Beth Lind

Salt Fat Acid Heat by Samin Nosrat

One Pot by Martha Stewart

Food in Jars by Marisa McClellan

From Asparagus to Zucchini by FairShare CSA Coalition

How to Cook Everything Vegetarian by Mark Bittman

In Pursuit of Flavor by Edna Lewis

The Art of Simple Food II by Alice Waters

Canal House Cooking by Hamilton & Hirsheimer

BLOGS/Websites

Blooming Glen Farm!

101 Cookbooks

Alexandra's Kitchen

Dishing up the Dirt

Half Baked Harvest

Minimalist Baker

Naturally Ella

Smitten Kitchen

The Leek & The Carrot

Martha Stewart Living





Try new things

One of the best things about being a part of a CSA is the opportunity to try new vegetables you aren't familiar with and experimenting with different combinations of food and flavors. Keep things extra interesting by selecting recipes that aren't the kind of thing you usually would make.

Some of our more experienced CSA members like to intentionally select at least one recipe per week that is outside their "standard wheelhouse" or that use a common vegetable in a different way. For example, instead of just roasting or grilling summer squash every week, opt for something unique like a squash pie.

Take inventory & set priorities before the next CSA pickup

CSA can feel overwhelming when the vegetables just keep coming. Whether you're receiving a share weekly or alt-weekly, things can really start to pile up.

Before the next week's share pickup, it's really important to take stock of the veggies you still have laying around and try to eat, wash, prep or even freeze those things that you know you likely won't eat within the "fresh window." These techniques will help you feel less overwhelmed when the next share arrives.





Learn some tried & true exit strategies

No matter how great you are at enjoying your CSA share, staying inspired and using up your produce each week, there will be weeks where you feel like you just can't possibly keep up in the kitchen.

This is the time for an "exit strategy": quick, go-to methods to use up produce fast so you can prepare for the next batch of bounty!

We share our favorite exit strategies on the next few pages.

Our Favorite Exit Strategies

1 A STIR FRY IS A GREAT WAY TO USE UP ODDS & ENDS BEFORE THE NEXT SHARE ARRIVES.

2 ROAST IT! EVEN BETTER, EXPLORE THE ART OF THE SHEET PAN MEAL!

Whenever you don't know what to do with the last two vegetables left in your fridge, I urge you to give roasting a try. There is hardly a vegetable that doesn't taste amazing roasted and if you can turn it into a sheet pan meal, all the better! Google "sheet pan meals" if you aren't familiar. It is a serious game changer.

3 PESTO!

You can make pesto out of pretty much any green you receive from the farm (basil, kale, dandelion, spinach, green garlic, scallions, etc) .And if you make too much, it freezes up great!

4 TRY MAKING GREEN CUBES

This is where you take a bunch of blanched greens and puree them together and then put them into ice cube trays (or muffin tins). Then add them to sauces or soups.



5

JUST GRILL IT!

When you aren't sure what to make with something or short on time- toss in some olive oil, salt, and pepper and grill it. Works great for MOST veggies (even some of the more unique ones).

This is the way your farmers enjoy most of their meals in the summer after a long day in the fields. Quick, easy & delicious!

6

IF ALL ELSE FAILS, THROW IT IN THE FREEZER

One of the absolute best ways to deal with produce you don't think you'll get to is utilize that freezer. You would be surprised how many vegetables can go straight into the freezer (no blanching or prep required): kale, spinach, chard, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, beets, peas, corn, onions, shredded zucchini. Toss them in freezer bags or freezer-proof containers and get them into the freezer.

Or, if you're feeling ambitious you can take things a bit further, If you have too much produce at any given time, chop it up and freeze or prep sauces for freezing so you can lessen your waste!

7

PLAY AROUND WITH MEALS THAT CAN INCORPORATE MANY VEGGIES

Think frittata, pizza, pasta, chili, tacos, spring rolls, scrambled eggs, etc. Use our Meal Template PDF to help you see the possibilities.





Preserving the harvest

Another great way to make the most of your CSA experience and lessen the amount of food waste is to learn some preservation techniques. We listed freezing as one of our exit strategies because it is one of the quickest and easiest ways to deal with excess produce. But that is not the only method of preservation! On the next page you will find a few of our other favorite preservation techniques.

Preservation Tips

1

SAVE YOUR SCRAPS FOR VEGGIE STOCK

Don't toss your scraps! Put them in a gallon-sized bag in the freezer and keep adding until full. Then in the fall or winter, add the veggies to a full pot of water, bring to a boil and let simmer at least 45 minutes and strain. Keep the liquid, toss the solids, and then you have delicious homemade vegetable stock for soups which you can freeze!

2

PLAY WITH OTHER SIMPLE TECHNIQUES LIKE FRIDGE PICKLES OR SALSA

3

EXPERIMENT WITH KIMCHI, KRAUTS AND OTHER FERMENTED PRODUCTS

A lot of our members swear by fermentation. Check out the local blog pickle.com for lots of recipes and tips for getting started.

4

BATCH COOK AND FREEZE HALF

Take advantage of the abundance by making double batches of things and freezing half. It's so nice to have those meals prepped and ready for a busy night.

5

AS YOUR CONFIDENCE GROWS, EXPERIMENT WITH CANNING

The local blog Foodinjars.com is an amazing resource. Once I embraced "small batch" canning, I was hooked.





Know the risks & rewards

No “Beginner’s Guide to CSA” would be complete without bringing up the understood “contract” between farmer and member.

When you join a CSA, you are shaking the farmer’s hand and giving your word that you will stand behind him/her through thick and thin that season. You financially commit your dollars to their operation.

In return, your farmers will grow the best vegetables they can to make good on that investment. As your farmers we set out with a plan for the season ahead. We seed the crops and do our best to get them to harvest in the allotted time.

But Mother Nature is fickle. She can send too much rain, high winds, bug infestations, or overly high temperatures that cause plants to drop flowers, or bolt and go to seed. Seed may not germinate at the proper percentage, leaving us just shy of our goals.

As farmers, we do our part to minimize the risks. We know how important it is to keep the soil healthy. When we tend to our soil, healthy plants follow -- leading to better disease resistance, better yields and better taste.

But every year, there is something that goes off course. As a member of a CSA farm, you ride this risk with the farmer.

When the fields are bountiful, you benefit in a share of that bounty. When the fields suffer due to circumstances out of our control, you take it in stride and stand by your farmer.

To have the very best experience with CSA, be sure you are 100% behind your farmer no matter what happens.

