



BIRMINGHAM-AREA FARMERS' MARKETS

Pepper Place: Saturdays, 7 a.m. to noon, through Dec. 17, Pepper Place, 2829 Second Ave. S., pepperplacemarket.com

East Lake: Saturdays, 8 a.m. to noon, though Oct. 8, East Lake United Methodist Church, 7769 Second Ave. S.

Center Point: Thursdays, 1 to 5 p.m., through August 25, Reed-Harvey Park, 335 Polly Reed Rd.

Adamsville: Tuesdays, 3-6 p.m. through Aug. 30, 3633 Gray Ave.

Bessemer: Saturdays, 7 a.m. to noon, through Aug. 6, 4500 Alabama Adventure Parkway

Homewood: Saturdays, 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., through Aug. 27, Soho Square parking lot, 2850 19th St. S.

Irondale: Wednesdays, 3 to 6 p.m., through Nov. 2, 1906 First Ave. N.

Riverchase United Methodist Church: Thursdays, noon to 5 p.m., through Aug. 25, 1953 Old Montgomery Highway

Ross Bridge: First and third Saturdays of the month, through Sept. 17, 2100 Grand Ave.

Trussville Springs: Saturdays, 8 a.m. to noon, through Sept. 10, 200 Spring St.



DINNER HOUR

What's Cooking at the Market

Shopping from a market's fresh bounty will yield a selection of the state's best produce.

By Jason Horn Photos by Cary Norton

Now that summer's nearly here, restaurant plates are overflowing with delicious fresh, seasonal and locally grown vegetables. But you don't have to be Frank Stitt to get your hands on the best produce Alabama has to offer; area farmers' markets bring growers and producers from around the state to sell their wares.

"Farmers are going to bring their prettiest, best stuff to a farmers' market," says Lisa Beasley, manager of the Pepper Place Saturday Market, the largest in the state with 100 vendors signed up for this season. "Prices are a bit higher than the grocery store, but for the most part, you'll get things that were picked yesterday."

As spring turns into summer, farmers will bring lots of peaches and tomatoes, as well as summer squash, okra, corn, onions, blackberries, watermelon and figs. You'll also find the tail end of some spring delights, like radishes, fava beans and strawberries, early in the month.

Many markets have recently expanded beyond just produce. At Pepper Place, you can find meat, cheese, milk, jellies, pickles, baked goods and more. Besides local veggies, the spring risotto below can use mushrooms from Walden Peak Farm in Signal Mountain, Tenn., a new vendor this year and Pepper Place's first purveyor of fungi.

But with so much variety, how are you supposed to choose? Your first step should be to walk the whole market before buying anything.

Once you've picked out a few vendors to sample, chat them up. The whole point of a farmers' market is that the farmers are there! "This is what they do, and they love to talk about it," Beasley says.

Ask for preparation and cooking tips for an unfamiliar vegetable, or about agricultural practices: Many market vendors follow organic rules but can't afford the expense of becoming officially certified, Beasley says.

Challenge yourself to eat seasonally and locally this summer. Free yourself from the air-conditioned, fluorescent-lit grocery store, and stroll your favorite farmers' market instead. The results may just surprise you.

At left, writer Jason Horn visits Pepper Place Saturday Market to purchase produce for spring risotto, at right.

Spring Risotto

Serves 2

- 2 (3- to 4-ounce) lamb chops
- 4 oz. asparagus, shelled and peeled fava beans, fiddlehead ferns or other spring vegetables
- 2 tbsp. butter, divided
- 4 oz. assorted mushrooms, chopped
- 3½ cups chicken stock
- 1 small, ½ large, or 2 to 3 spring onions, chopped
- ½ cup Arborio rice
- ¼ cup white wine or dry vermouth
- 2 tbsp. heavy cream
- Freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- Chopped fresh herbs, such as parsley or chives

1. Season the lamb chops on both sides with salt and pepper. Cook in a grill pan or sauté pan over high heat, turning once or twice, until medium rare or desired doneness. Remove to a plate and cover with foil.

2. Blanch the spring vegetables in simmering water for 1 to 2 minutes. Drain and set aside.

3. Heat 1 tbsp. of the butter in a medium pan over medium-high heat until the foam subsides. Add the mushrooms and sauté until cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the reserved spring vegetables and cook another 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from the heat, season to taste with salt and pepper and set aside.

4. Bring the stock to a boil over high heat in a small saucepan. Reduce the heat to medium-low and keep at a low boil.

5. Heat the remaining 1 tbsp. butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. When the foam subsides, add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until it just begins to brown, about 5 minutes. Add the rice and cook, stirring constantly for 30 seconds. Add the wine and cook, stirring constantly, until fully absorbed. Add about ½ cup of the stock and cook, stirring constantly, until mostly absorbed. Repeat until all the stock is used up and the rice is very tender. Turn off the heat and stir in the cream and reserved mushroom mixture. Season to taste with parmesan, salt and pepper.

6. Divide the risotto between two shallow bowls and top with a lamb chop. Sprinkle with herbs. ●

