



What Is Community-Supported Agriculture? How to Join a CSA

By Dana Hudepohl
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How CSAs Work

CSAs are direct partnerships between farmers and consumers. Members pay a seasonal or annual fee to receive a share of fresh, locally grown produce at regular intervals, typically biweekly or weekly. CSAs generally run for 20–26 weeks out of the year. During CSA season, members retrieve their shares at a designated pickup location (such as a community center or farmers market) or, in some cases, have their shares delivered directly to their homes. In addition to fruits and vegetables, some CSAs offer extras such as grains and artisanal products.

How Much Does a CSA Cost?

CSA prices vary depending on location, farm size, and share options. On average, expect to pay:

- **Small share:** \$10–\$25 per week
- **Medium share:** \$25–\$40 per week
- **Large share:** \$40–\$60 or more per week

Full-season memberships typically range from \$300 to \$1,000. Some farms offer flexible payment plans or sliding-scale pricing. When weighing the value, consider that a CSA provides fresh, locally grown produce at peak ripeness—often at a lower cost than organic store-bought options. Plus, you’re directly supporting local farmers and sustainable farming practices.

How to Find a CSA

Ready to join a CSA but not sure where to start? Here are some strategies for finding and choosing one that’s right for you.

1. Check Bulletin Boards

Keep an eye out for flyers posted in community spaces such as health food stores, yoga studios, and coffee shops.

The first time I heard about community-supported agriculture (CSA) was the year after I transitioned to eating a whole-food, plant-based diet. I’d moved to a new city, and my neighbor told me about a nearby spot to pick up fresh produce brought in from a farm. In a CSA, a farmer offers a certain number of “shares” through membership. By paying a subscription fee, I could access farm-fresh fruits and vegetables delivered weekly to a church parking lot—despite living in a metropolitan area.

Admittedly, my CSA experience got off to a rough start. With excitement, I brought home my first overflowing bundle and tossed dark leafy greens into my smoothie. One sip in, I realized the bitter, peppery flavor of mustard greens wasn’t the ideal complement to strawberries. Right then and there, I learned to Google ways to serve up vegetables that were new to me.

Things went much more smoothly after that. Every week, I enjoyed old favorites while discovering new ones, like red chard. I loved that I was cooking with ingredients fresh from the soil and at the same time supporting a small family farm with sustainable agricultural practices. Joining a CSA is the perfect complement to a healthy plant-based lifestyle. Read on for an overview of how CSAs work and a step-by-step guide to finding the right one for you.

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2. Talk to the Farmers Market Manager

Since many CSA farmers are also vendors at farmers markets, the markets sometimes serve as a pickup point for CSA members to collect their shares. The next time you're shopping at the market, ask the vendors if they offer CSA shares. Another option: Pick the brain of the market manager (found at a designated booth).

3. Research From Home

If in-person searches don't yield results, plenty of online resources can help.

- Visit your local farmers market's website or Facebook page. Find the manager's contact info, and reach out directly to ask about local CSAs. Another strategy: Scroll through the list of farms that participate in the farmer's market. Then go to the farm websites and see if they offer CSA.
- Do a good-old-fashioned Google search for CSAs near you. Start by Googling search terms like "organic farms near me" or "CSA farms near (your city)." The great part about this approach is you can read through customer Google reviews in the process.
- Check out [LocalHarvest.org](https://localharvest.org), a grassroots database with more than 4,000 CSAs, the most comprehensive directory of CSA farms out there. After clicking on "Find a Local CSA," your farm options appear with a quick synopsis and location information about the nearest pickup spot. Once you click on a farm's name, you will get more details about each farm, including pricing and the range of locations. Click on "Visit our listing" to discover crops offered each season.
- Use the [USDA's CSA directory](https://www.usda.gov/organic/csa-directory) by entering your city or ZIP code. Click the "Select directories" field, and some options will display below. Check the box that says "CSA." Then click "Search." You'll find a list of CSAs along with contact details, website links, and social media accounts—helpful so that you can poke around and get a photo tour of what to expect in your weekly share.

4. Narrow Down and Pick

Once you determine which CSAs have convenient

pickup locations for you, find the right fit for your needs. Here are some aspects to consider.

- Customizability: Are you excited about taking what you get, or would you prefer an option where you have a say in what you order?
- Trial opportunities: Do you feel like you need a test run? Some CSAs offer trial memberships.
- Flexibility: What are their policies if you miss a box or go out of town?
- Volume: How much food do you want each week? (When just starting out, it's generally smart to opt for the smallest share size and then go from there.)
- Support: Some CSAs offer features like an online community, access to other partner farms' products, or the opportunity to visit the farm. Others share storage tips, preparation ideas and recipes.

5. Enjoy!



As soon as you bring your weekly bundle home, make a plan for your produce. Learn from my rookie mistake: Identify any unfamiliar vegetables and research how to use them, rather than winging it. Check out Forks Over Knives' Seasonal Produce Guides for help in that department:

- [Spring Produce Guide](#)
- [Winter Produce Guide](#)
- [Summer Produce Guide](#)
- [Fall Produce Guide](#)