



Farmers Market Tips: Dos and Don'ts

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Ready to breeze through the farmers market with ease and come home with the best-looking produce—without blowing your food budget? Whether you shop the farmers' market every week or just once in a while, these tips will help you ace your experience and make the most of the local bounty.

Make a List (But Don't Stick to It Too Carefully)

Lists are great for remembering everything you need, but leave yourself some wiggle room to take advantage of what's best and what's a bargain. Does that kale you wanted look a little wilted? Go for the Swiss chard instead. Planning on peaches but the seller has a special on plums? Adjust and adapt.

Go Early for the Best Selection. Go Late for the Best Deals

The two best times to shop at a farmers market are at the start or toward the end, when crowds are lighter and lines are shorter. Early birds benefit from the most choices and optimal freshness. Latecomers can find special offers on produce that needs to be sold before growers pack up for the day.

Shop with a Friend

Want more for your money... and more variety? Pair up with a pal and split your purchases. This tactic lets you save money by buying larger quantities—such as a quart of berries rather than a pint or a 2-for-1 special—and lets you take home a wider assortment of shared items.

Double Bag It

Take two bags instead of one to make your rounds through the market. Having two carriers lets you switch purchases around more easily while you shop, so delicate items, such as herbs, tomatoes, and berries, don't get crushed under a bunch of carrots or a pound of zucchini.

Pay Attention to Etiquette

Serve yourself or wait to be served? Mix-and-match or priced individually? Every stand has a different (often unspoken) code of etiquette. Look around, see how things work, and shop accordingly. Be choosy, but avoid obnoxious behavior such as pulling back the husks on a dozen ears of corn before buying two, or leaving a cauliflower display in disarray after you've searched for the perfect head. If you're looking for bargains, don't haggle over set prices. Instead, ask growers if they have "seconds"—bruised or misshapen produce—that they'll sell you at a lower price, or make them an offer on what's left at the very end of the market.

Chat Up the Growers

Personal exchanges are a big part of what makes the farmers market experience so great. Vendors and growers can also be great resources for easy recipes, prep and storage tips, and knowledge of which fruits and veggies are at their peak.

Have Payment Ready

Bring small bills (ones and fives are best) for cash purchases, use the same credit card from week to week so you don't have to re-enter receipt information in the credit card reader, and open your mobile payment app while waiting in line. Doing so helps avoid hold-ups when it's time to pay.

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