



Spring Fever

For growers, cooks, and chefs, the new season means “fresh.”

By Ivy Lamb

★ | For foodies of every flavor, it's time to celebrate. This month, local farmers' markets are in full swing with live music, cooking demos, and of course the first bounty of the season.

Although summer is the pinnacle for abundant produce, spring offers a wide variety of greens that thrive in the cooler weather. Not sure what's in season or what to do with it? Let these cooks, authors, and growers help.

**Amelia Saltsman,
Santa Monica, California**

“Spring is one of my favorite times at the market,” says writer and cooking instructor Amelia Saltsman. “You can really feel the season changing.” Saltsman shares her knowledge and passion for seasonal food in her *Santa Monica Farmers' Market Cookbook*, with recipes to inspire home cooks. “I recommend using all your senses when shopping at the farmers' market,” Saltsman says. “And don't be afraid to ask the farmer for a taste! Great flavor is a proud farmer's best selling tool.”



Many assume that Southern California is seasonless, but Saltsman says that's not so. At the Santa Monica market in April and May, you might find crisp lettuces, spring avocados, asparagus, artichokes, and flavorful, late-season citrus. Spring is also the height of strawberry season in Southern California, and the state's strawberry capital, Oxnard, is only 50 miles from Santa Monica. “Strawberries grown by small, family farms are totally different from the strawberries in the grocery store that have been shipped and stored,” Saltsman says. “Local, peak-season strawberries are luscious, juicy, and red all the way through.” In one of Saltsman's favorite spring recipes, local berries elevate the humble strawberry shortcake to a blissful gastronomic experience.

Top: Local spring produce, Left, Amelia Saltsman at the Santa Monica Farmers Market

PHOTOS (FROM TOP) BY CHUCK PLACE/ALAMY AND BY WILLIAM JOHNSON

Wine & Dine |



Strawberry Shortcakes

3 to 4 pints strawberries,
hulled and quartered lengthwise
2 to 4 tbs. sugar
1 to 2 tbs. lemon juice
1 cup heavy cream

For the Biscuits

2 cups plus 2 tbs. flour
1/4 cup sugar, plus more for
sprinkling
1 tbs. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
1 1/2 cups heavy cream

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Place berries in bowl and sprinkle with sugar and lemon juice to taste. Stir gently, then let stand until some syrup forms, at least 30 minutes. Whip cream to soft peaks, and refrigerate until serving.

Make the biscuits: In a bowl, stir flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Use fork to make a well in dry ingredients and pour in cream. Working from center toward bowl's edge, use fork to stir dry ingredients into cream until just blended. The dough will be sticky and lumpy. Using large spoon, scoop dough portions the size of small lemons onto prepared pan. You should have 12 biscuits. Sprinkle tops with sugar. Bake until lightly golden, 15 to 17 minutes. Let cool for at least 15 minutes on pan, then slice in half horizontally. Biscuits are best served within a couple of hours of baking, but may be refreshed in hot oven. Or freeze some unbaked for another time (bake frozen biscuits for 30 minutes).

Assemble the shortcakes: Just before serving, place biscuit bottoms, cut side up, in individual bowls, top with strawberries, some syrup, and whipped cream, and then biscuit tops. Surround with more berries. Makes 12.



Sepia Restaurant participating in CHef's BBQ at Green Acres

Green Acres Farm, North Judson, Indiana

For farmer Beth Eccles and her husband, Brent, spring brings a welcome crop of greens: arugula, green garlic, chives, baby spring onions, and more. "In the Midwest, we're crazy for anything green and fresh in the spring," she says. The couple runs Green Acres, a third-generation family farm in rural Indiana. Beth Eccles's grandfather, a Japanese immigrant, started Green Acres by growing and selling Asian vegetables in the 1930s. Today, the Eccles have expanded the farm's offerings, cultivating organic produce and selling at local farmers' markets, including Chicago's Green City Market.

For small farmers, selling at the market is more profitable because they sell directly to customers and chefs. But Eccles says she loves the farmers' market because she gets to meet customers and answer questions. "Some customers really become part of our family," Eccles says. "If one of my regulars doesn't show up for a few weeks, I start to get really worried."

Early in the season, sorrel flies off their produce tables. "It's the first thing people ask for when the market opens in spring," Eccles says. "It's a perennial

herb that has a very pungent, sharp, lemony flavor. It pairs nicely with fish, and it goes well in soups." Appropriately, a Green Acres customer first gave them the idea for sorrel soup, a family favorite.



TKTK Eccles

Sorrel Soup

3 cups vegetable or chicken broth
(try a broth using fresh, green
garlic)
2 tbs. uncooked basmati rice
1 bunch sorrel, leaves only
1/2 cup heavy cream
good salt and fresh ground
pepper

Bring broth to boil and stir in rice. Continue to boil for about 10 minutes. Stir in sorrel and return to boil. Remove from heat and puree. Return soup to low heat and stir in cream, salt, and pepper. Serves four.

To enhance, add medley of sauteed vegetables after you've pureed soup, or top with a garnish.



**Deborah Madison,
Santa Fe, New Mexico**

Cook and writer Deborah Madison traveled across the U.S. for her book *Local Flavors: Cooking and Eating from America's Farmers' Markets*, but she has called New Mexico home for the past 20 years, and supported the Santa Fe Farmers' Market for almost as long. For first-time market shoppers, she offers this advice: "If you're nervous about trying a new ingredient, start with something you know," Madison says. "Then maybe try one new thing, bring it home, and explore your cookbooks to get ideas."

Santa Fe's high altitude means cool nights — perfect for growing sweet, crisp lettuces, peas, and herbs. Madison also notes that longer days cause chickens to start laying again, which means lots of fresh eggs at the farmers' market. Her recipe for *trouchia* (a Provençal frittata) is an easy, delicious way to use the abundance of chard and eggs found at the market in springtime.

For Madison, the farmers' market offers more than just fresh, seasonal produce. "The farmers' market is a happy place," Madison says. "Shopping at the market gives you benefits of health and flavor, and it also makes food more of an adventure. You start to see the world differently and connect to your wider community." ✨

"SHOPPING AT THE MARKET GIVES YOU BENEFITS OF HEALTH AND FLAVOR, AND IT ALSO MAKES FOOD MORE OF AN ADVENTURE." — Deborah Madison, cook and writer

***Chard and Onion
Omelet with Basil and
Gruyere (Trouchia)***

- 3 tbs. olive oil*
- 1 large red onion, quartered and thinly sliced crosswise*
- 1 large bunch chard, leaves only, coarsely chopped*
- Salt and freshly milled pepper*
- 1 clove garlic*
- 6 to 8 large eggs, lightly beaten*
- 2 tbs. chopped parsley*
- 2 tbs. chopped or torn basil leaves*
- 2 tsp. chopped thyme leaves*
- 1 cup grated gruyère cheese*
- 2 tbs. freshly grated parmesan cheese*

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a 10-inch skillet. Add onion and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until completely soft but without letting it color, about 15 minutes. Add chard and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until moisture has cooked away and chard is tender, about 15 minutes. Season well with salt and freshly ground pepper.

Meanwhile, mash garlic in mortar with a few pinches of salt, then stir



Chef James Campbell Caruso
is a regular at the Santa Fe Market

into eggs along with herbs. Combine chard-onion mixture with eggs, stir in gruyère cheese and half the parmesan. Preheat broiler.

Warm remaining oil in skillet over medium-high heat. When hot, add eggs. Slide pan back and forth a few times to make sure eggs aren't sticking, then turn to low. Cook until eggs are set but still quite moist on top. Add remaining cheese, slide pan under broiler, and broil until browned.

Serve *trouchia* in pan or slide onto serving dish and cut into wedges. The grained top and golden bottom are equally presentable. Serves 4 to 6.

PHOTOS (FROM TOP) BY DOUGLAS MERRIAN AND BY DEBORAH MADISON; RECIPE USED WITH PERMISSION FROM VEGETARIAN COOKING FOR EVERYONE BY DEBORAH MADISON (CLARKSON POTTER, 2007)