

Fresh Greens a Sweet Surprise at Winter Farmers Markets

Written by LYNNE GOLDMAN

Many people think locally grown products disappear in the winter. Not so! With new farming methods, many local farms continue to grow vegetables through the winter. Consequently, there are now many winter farmers markets in the River Towns area. That doesn't mean you'll find tomatoes in January, but you will find sweet carrots, beautiful greens, colorful winter squash, pasture-raised meats, cheese, eggs and a wide variety of foodstuffs made with local ingredients.

One winter Saturday, just a couple of years ago, **Rolling Hills Farm** from Lambertville, N.J., showed up with fresh carrots at the **Wrightstown Winter Farmers Market** in Upper Makefield Township, Pa. Locally grown carrots in winter? So, what's the big deal, you might ask, I can get carrots at the grocery store. Not this sweet, though. Farmer Stephanie Spock says she almost had a fight break out between two customers when there was only one carton of carrots left. And climate change aside, it still gets pretty cold around here in winter. How were they growing them?

One of the newest developments in local farming is the use of high tunnels or hoop houses. These structures, similar to greenhouses but not as controlled or expensive, enable our Delaware River Valley farmers to extend the seasons and grow hardy vegetables during the winter. That's why you may find fresh greens, like spinach, kale, Swiss chard, radicchio, cabbage and salad mixes at local winter farmers markets.

Malaika Spencer, owner of **Roots to River Farm** in Solebury, Pa., and Titusville, N.J. explains how this works: "We seed greens in September and October into unheated greenhouses that are ready to harvest December through March. If we get the successions right, we can have fresh greens through the whole winter." And while winter growing has its challenges, Malaika says, she loves providing whatever she can in the winter. "We think it's a great opportunity for people to be in touch with real seasonality."

One of my favorite winter dishes is roasted vegetables. It's easy to throw together on a weeknight and with locally grown



produce it is so delicious.

I buy whatever is available at the farmers market — like carrots, potatoes, radishes, onions, turnips or even apples — cut it up, toss in olive oil and salt, spread it out on a baking pan and roast at 400 degrees. Check it every 20 minutes or so for doneness, tossing the vegetables with a spatula to get even cooking. My dinner guests eat it up and ask for my recipe. I try to explain. It's not the recipe; it's the ingredients. When you are cooking with locally grown, fresh product, the flavor is astonishingly different from supermarket produce.

In addition to vegetables, most of the winter farmers markets also offer a variety of other foodstuffs, like freshly baked bread, artisan cheeses, pasture-raised pork, beef and poultry, prepared foods and locally roasted coffee. So, when winter comes around, remember it's not the end of the season, it's just the beginning of a new season. Visit a local winter farmers market to continue eating fresh and local. 