

Fresh, local goodness is easy to find this season

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Coppell Farmers Market draws shoppers including Pat Mendias with excellent artisans, such as Wackym's Kitchen of Dallas.

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It's May — time for everyone to get up a little earlier on Saturday for some farmers market action.

North Texas markets are getting better all the time. We're entering peak local-produce season, when we see ambrosial sun-ripe tomatoes, juicy peaches, bountiful zucchini and more. Expect the goodness to last through at least early August.

Artisan food makers also are flourishing, from bakers to coffee roasters. Plus, markets offer a great opportunity to meet the people who grow or create the food you buy.

Even in peak season, finding local produce takes some sleuthing because demand exceeds farmers' supply. That means better-established markets tend to get the best local farmers.

All farmers also are subject to the whims of Mother Nature, so you have to be prepared to roll with the harvest. This spring's bountiful rain? Too much of a good thing for some local crops.

If you're in the mood for a little day trip, a number of farmers have started their own farm stands. These include Good Earth Organic Farm in Celeste and Farmer Jones Eco-Friendly Produce in Terrell. Comeback Creek, which primarily supplies restaurants, has just opened the Farmer's Wife, a new storefront in Mount Pleasant, and Ham Orchards near Terrell, famous for its peaches, opens Friday.

Here are few favorite spots:

Coppell Farmers Market

Still the best all-round market with great, vetted farmers and excellent artisans, not to mention a killer pavilion unveiled last year just for the market. It also offers a kids' playground and water feature. This market has the best website, too.

Highlights: It's all good, but especially note River Bird Coffee Community Roasting from Lewisville (Aaron Packer has a sweet story), Joe the Baker (with macarons and breakfast breads), Two Chefs (chips and salsa) and Wholesome Habit (dehydrated kale snacks), to name a few.

Historic McKinney Farmers Market

The Chestnut Square Historic Village gets an A for ambience, with heritage buildings, big arching trees and flower-draped trellises. There's even a little goat pen.

This market has a great mix of vendors, but because the rules allow some produce that's not farmer-grown, you have to ask where some things come from. (No, farmers aren't harvesting local field tomatoes yet.) Fortunately, lots of solid local farmers have stalls here.

Highlights: Love the Mountainman Jerky Co. (made with grass-fed beef), HiteHouse Confections (handmade salted caramels), Providence Ranch Pecans and the Brownie Cottage (both branching out from the Dallas Farmers Market), Lihoudes (the second year for its Greek specialties), among many others.

Dallas Farmers Market in The Shed

The one to watch, as new leadership transforms the refurbished Shed into a farmer-oriented market. Starting June 1, all permanent stalls and tropical fruit will be gone. But longtime Canton farmer J.T. Lemley is back for another season (on the north side this time). Saturdays and Sundays remain the most popular market days, for now.

Highlights: The Cowgirl Whey Texas chèvre, D's Sourdough breads, Jami's Handmade Pies, Pam's Best Jams and Jellies (unique combinations), Boom Juice (fresh-squeezed juices) and so many more. The excellent artisan roster keeps growing.

Good Local Markets

The name change has been confusing, but they are still the same excellent, top-tier markets: Lakeside the first and third Saturday of the month (Lakeside Baptist Church), White Rock the second and fourth Saturday (Greenspot Market and Fuels) and Vickery Meadow every Sunday.

Highlights: Mom's Buns Bakery at White Rock (flavored yeast rolls), Gardeners in Community Development (a mouthful that means Asian community gardens), LaraLand Farms' free-range red wattle pork, among so many others.

Saint Michael's Farmers Market

An up-and-comer that gets better every year.

Highlights: Baugh Farms, Wolfe Pen Creek Farm (awesome yogurt), Becerra's Tex-Mex (tamales and award-winning salsas), and many more.

A solid lineup.

Uptown Farmers Market at West Village

This year's newbie. It's packed into the South Alley between the Magnolia Theatre and Mi Cocina, a minimarket with a promising start. Light on farmer-grown produce because most farmers are committed elsewhere. Give it time.

Highlights: Promise of Peace Garden, Designs by Diana (jarred goods), Gimme Emporium (includes breads such as scones), Texas Toffee, Basic Foodism (barbecue and other sauces).

VENDOR SPOTLIGHT

Mom's Buns Bakery

This is a vendor to watch. Laura Spindler's yeast rolls, based on her grandmother's recipe, are quickly earning a following. For the swirled flavors, she adds ingredients into the dough, such as chopped dark chocolate, jalapeños and cheese, and strawberry-vanilla. No wonder she's looking for a commercial kitchen.

Find her at White Rock the second and fourth Saturdays and Saint Michael's the first Saturday of each month.

Kim Pierce is a Dallas freelance writer who has covered North Texas farmers markets and the locavore scene for more than 30 years.

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