

GRIST FOR THE MILL



One of my favourite pastimes on a cold winter day is to head out to one of our region's numerous year-round farmers' markets. Maybe it's because I'm guaranteed to find local products, fish and meats without any difficulty. But I think there's much more to it.

Visiting a market during the winter is very different from browsing farmers' markets during the heat of summer. The most obvious difference is that winter markets are held indoors, where there's a greater sense of intimacy and camaraderie – both amongst the vendors and between the vendors and the shoppers. Because the space is more confined, it seems to me that there is much more interaction and conversation going on. I confess that I enjoy making the rounds of my favourite farmers and food artisans, not just to check out their products and make my purchases, but also to find out their latest news and listen to their interesting stories. And there are always interesting stories!

If you've never been to a farmers' market during the winter, you'll find the variety of local produce available to be much more varied than you could have imagined. Aside from apples, pears and the traditional winter storage vegetables, such as root vegetables, onions, cabbages and winter squash, there are numerous varieties of greenhouse vegetables, including tomatoes, sweet peppers and cucumbers, as well as greens, lettuces, fresh herbs and sprouts, and mushrooms. When people complain about getting bored with the vegetables available during the colder months, I think of this list and wonder whether I'm the only person around who prefers these hearty offerings to those available during the summer.

The markets are also filled with artisan producers selling everything from homemade sausages to jams and jellies, savoury condiments, cheese, breads and pastries, honey and maple syrup, and prepared foods.

And then there's the choice of fresh and smoked fish, along with poultry and meats – most of which are certified organic or naturally raised. Everything you can think of is available at these markets, from chicken, pheasant and turkey to beef, pork, lamb, veal, bison, elk, venison and wild boar. Talk about knowing where your food comes from – you'll likely be buying your elk from the farmer who raised it!

So check out the listing of year-round farmers' markets on page 55, and make a point of supporting our local farmers and food artisans. You'll be sure to head home with some fabulous products and some wonderful experiences.

I've been overwhelmed by the positive response that followed the launch of *Edible Toronto* in September. I've received phone calls and emails from readers across Ontario, all of which were extremely heartening and greatly appreciated. Please keep your comments and suggestions coming. You can contact me directly at editor@edibletoronto.com.

With warmest regards,

Gail Gordon Oliver

EDIBLE TORONTO

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR
Gail Gordon Oliver

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN
Cheryl Koehler
Stephen Munshin

CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew Akiwenzie
Samantha Albert
Laura Berman
Lauren Carter
Charmian Christie
Matthew Church
David Cohlmeier
Ryan Donovan
Elizabeth Driver
Katie Drummond
Judith Finlayson
Gail Gordon Oliver
Margaret Nearing
Tobey Nemeth
Daphna Rabinovitch
Edwin Rowse
Kat Tancock
Carole Topalian
LeeAnne Wright
Laura Young

CONTACT US

19 Dewbourne Ave.
Toronto, Ontario M5P 1Z3

Phone: (416) 481-7474

Fax: (416) 488-0035

Email: info@edibletoronto.com
www.edibletoronto.com

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