

Rotating Extension Column
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Spring Produce Crop Late, But Promising



Finding and buying locally grown produce is worth the effort. Though this is usually not routine grocery shopping, the payoff is found in fresh, flavorful and nutritious fruits and vegetables. Sometimes it is possible to obtain products that have been harvested for only a few hours. Buying locally grown produce rewards the consumer, and also helps more small farmers to stay in business.

The availability of locally grown fruits and vegetables is seasonal, so a crop report concerning popular Northwest Florida products might be in order. Early blueberries began appearing in mid-May and will be available through June. The heat and long summer days end our local blueberry season by mid-July, so enjoy while you can.

Some early planted summer squash tolerated the cool nights this spring and began appearing on the market by mid-May. The first sweet corn harvest that I observed this year in Santa Rosa County occurred during the first week of June. Fresh corn harvest will likely occur all this month and continue into early July. The amount of corn on the market drops off after that, primarily due to increased pest pressure which discourages many farmers from the summer planting of this crop.

Local farmers also began planting additional blackberries a few years ago and more than usual are expected to be available this spring. Early harvest began the first week of June and should continue for three or four weeks.

Some peppers began showing up in early June and tomato harvest will begin in earnest by the middle of the month. Eggplant will be slightly behind.

Okra, snap beans and southern peas are expected to be available by mid-June and will continue throughout the warm season, if the weather and market price remains acceptable.

Watermelons are also running later than normal. They are usually planted as early as possible in order to harvest in early to mid-June and obtain better prices.

However, an extra cold spring delayed planting until late March and early April this year. Large quantities of watermelons are not expected until early to mid-July.

Watch for these and other locally grown fresh produce items. Fruit and vegetable producers market their products in several ways, so check with local farmers' markets and retail outlets, as well as U-Pick operations and on-farm opportunities for purchasing.

Note: Weather watchers, as well as consumers and farmers will find that this spring's unusually low temperatures have greatly affected fruit and vegetable production. Though the yield and quality might eventually be considered high, the early harvest and corresponding best prices might be lost.

Most of the spring and summer crops mentioned require on average, base temperatures no lower than about 52 degrees F. to grow and develop.

This spring, between March 15 and April 15 in central Santa Rosa County we received temperatures below that threshold during 24 days.

There were 214 hours during this month long period when the growth and development of early planted crops was stopped due to excessively low temperatures. It's no wonder that early planted crops couldn't stay on schedule!

