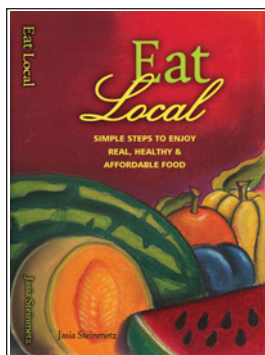


EAT LOCAL: Family Traditions Go Local! by Jasia Steinmetz RD

Family time is like a small tornado with everything and everyone flying in different directions to meet endless deadlines and schedules. Many families are buzzing from minute to minute during the day and meals are just one more item on the "to-do" list.

Rituals and family traditions can help ground all of us in busy times and food often has a significant role to play in many traditions.

Some of our most powerful childhood memories include food; both the smell and taste of a familiar food can unearth a memory that has long been buried. The taste of a tart locally grown apple brings back memories of my siblings and I climbing an apple tree in a farm family's yard eating as many as we chose.

As an urban child, I was struck by the abundance, crispness and small size of the apples, as if the tree knew these were perfect for children. Today, when I see all the varieties of apples in the farmers' market, I have that same feeling of knowing a secret between nature and myself.

As adults, we are creating food memories for our children fostering a relationship between nature, family and food and shaping their food preferences. With the growth of farmers' markets across the nation and the efforts of grocers to bring local foods in your neighborhood stores, we can create food memories that are rooted in our local communities, specific to the geographic area where we live. Eating local gives our children a sense of place, with seasonal foods that are unique to your area's farms and farmers. Children are exposed to new flavors and textures while you as a parent are assured they are eating the healthiest, freshest food possible. Here are some tips to connect your family with healthy local food traditions and take advantage of fall flavors.

A family outing to a farmers' market to introduce local foods to your children can become a weekend ritual. In urban areas, we may not have many opportunities to meet a farmer or to see the abundance of food that is grown, while a farmers' market brings both farmers and fresh, affordable food within reach. If you would like your children to see the variety of colors and tastes of food, the farmers' market is an adventure, similar to a zoo of food! A few coins in your children's pockets will be more adventurous as they find fun foods to eat.

We know that more children are involved with food, the more likely they are to eat it. A farmer can identify any foods that children (and adults) may not recognize. If you are concerned about pesticides and other chemicals

on food, look for "certified organic" signs and labels and ask farmers about the chemicals that are used in produce production. Farmers can also give you suggestions for choosing the most ripe or provide storage tips.

Have food tastings similar to wine tastings, using different varieties of foods. This will help everyone pay attention to the flavor, color and texture of food. In our local market, there is a variety of apples and pears; each having their own distinctive flavors. Since a tasting only requires a small bite, people are willing to taste.

Children can draw faces to describe their likes and dislikes. Experimenting with new foods may be a tradition within your family or a new habit for parents and children. Trying multiple varieties of one food, such as tomatoes or peaches, promotes biodiversity within our food system, resulting in more variation in nutrients and phytochemicals.

Teaching your children about real, whole foods is as easy as finding pumpkins for Halloween. The local foods in our markets help children understand that many foods are root crops, such as potatoes, carrots, onions, and beets while other are above ground like squash, pumpkins and Brussel sprouts. Experimenting with local fall crops can be easy since most can be roasted together or combined for stews or soups.

Enjoying a variety of foods and concentrating on taste promotes moderation that helps control childhood obesity. Small portions of various produce, as in roasted root veggies, are healthy for children and help reach that 5 a day in fruits and vegetables. You can ask your farmer or search the internet for recipes for the autumn crops.

Local farmers are able to grow varieties that are not available in the conventional grocery stores of major food chains. These foods may not ship well, may not have a standard size or shape or are produced in smaller harvests, all factors which make local markets the hub for unique foods. Many fruits and vegetables come from generation old trees, bushes and seeds, some that have been carried from our ancestor's home country. Eating local food continues our local history and cultural heritage that is passed down to our children.

Food and nutrition authority and registered dietitian Jasia Steinmetz is the author of "Eat Local: Simple Steps to Enjoy Real, Healthy & Affordable Food" - a simple, step-by-step roadmap for improving diet and nutrition with local, sustainable and organic food choices. For more info, www.EatLocalSimpleSteps.com.



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