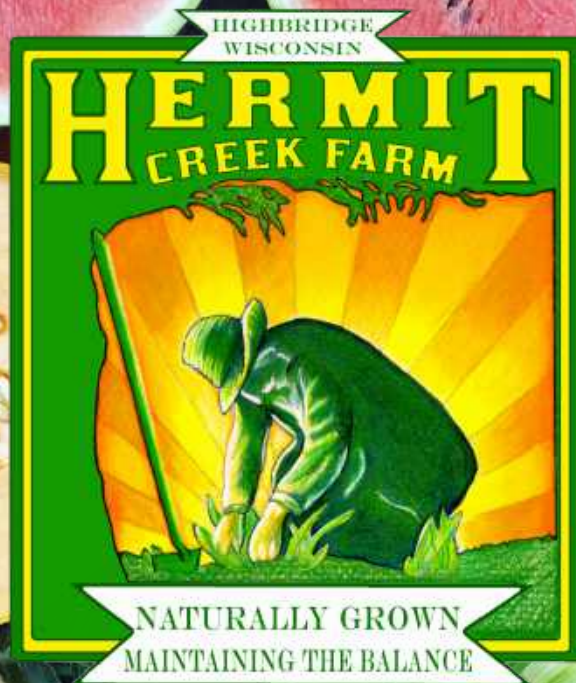


# Tips & Tricks for CSA Success

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE FOR CSA MEMBERS



## VEGGIE EXIT STRATEGIES

HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EXCESS PRODUCE & AVOID FOOD WASTE

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

ESSENTIAL KITCHEN TOOLS THAT WILL SET YOU UP FOR SUCCESS

## STORAGE TIPS

HOW TO MAXIMIZE SHELF LIFE & PRIORITIZE YOUR MEAL PLANNING

# CSA can be hard, but it doesn't have to be.

If you are a first time CSA member or early in your CSA tenure, you might not realize just what you have gotten yourself into.

CSA and supporting local farms is incredibly fun and rewarding, but cooking with fresh food and bringing a constant supply of fresh vegetables into your home every week can be overwhelming at times. In fact, you should know that the average CSA member says it takes them about 2 years to feel like they're getting it down.

We know that what you *really* need is a guide that helps you understand how to efficiently deal with the bounty so you can feel good about what you are feeding your family..

Throughout this e-book you will learn tips, tricks and strategies gleaned from our CSA Master members to help you shorten the learning curve of CSA. Armed with this knowledge, you'll better understand how to prioritize your menu plan, deal with the overwhelm, and put any excess produce away for long-term storage -- so you can feel confident this CSA season!

Ready?... Let's dive in.





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# Unpack your box correctly

When you first get started with your CSA, one of the things that might trip you up is not knowing how to pack up the veggies for the way home. You get to the drop site and see a lot of produce in the box, but aren't sure how to transfer it. It's a good idea to take everything out of the box and then load it into your reusable bags, starting with the heaviest items and ending with the most delicate.

It's smart to go straight home and not run errands after pick up. Leaving your veggies in a hot car will make them spoil faster.



1. Think about how we pack your CSA box (because it's exactly how you should pack your bags to go home).

We put the heaviest, hardest to damage stuff on the bottom, followed by light-weight bagged goodies and finally the most delicate things on top (herbs, greens, tomatoes, etc).



# Store things properly

We talk a lot about storage throughout the course of the CSA. It will be the first section of every newsletter. You'll see it in the storage guide we give you before the season begins.

There's a reason for this. Proper storage of vegetables is essential. If you store things properly, they last longer, and you don't have to rush to use them. Many vegetables can last 1-3 weeks based on the quality of storage. And that means less food waste.



# Storage Tips

1

CUT THE EDIBLE GREENS FROM THINGS LIKE CARROTS, BEETS, KOHLRABI, AND RADISHES

You will likely want to save these edible greens but when you store them together the greens will drain moisture from the roots. Remove the greens and store separately from the roots.

2

BAG IT UP!

Storing vegetables loose in the fridge is easy and uses less plastic, but isn't actually great for long-term storage. You should store most of your veggies (especially your greens!) in plastic bags in the fridge after you get home. Wash the bags and re-use them. We recommend you buy Debbie Meyer Green bags for this.

3

WASH ONLY WHAT YOU PLAN TO USE

Everything coming from our farm will be washed and well-cleaned. Washing it before use will only add unnecessary moisture that will cause produce to lose crispness and get soggy faster. Over time, most CSA members discover that if you just wash the amount of vegetables you are planning to use, they will stay fresh a lot longer.

4

REMOVE RUBBERBANDS OR TWISTIE TIES FOR BETTER CIRCULATION

5

READ YOUR NEWSLETTER!  
USE IT TO SET PRIORITIES

Our CSA newsletter will always tell you everything you need to know about where to store things (fridge versus pantry versus basement) as well as whether it wants to be stored in a bag (or not), and how long you can expect it to last.

It's a good idea to take some time to read through the newsletter each week and mentally (or literally) sort all of the veggies based on what will expire fastest. This way you'll know what you should prioritize cooking first and what can wait.

6

STORE FRUITS & VEGETABLES SEPARATELY

We won't be giving you much fruit, but that doesn't mean you won't have a bunch in your fridge already. The ethylene gas given off by fruit can cause faster spoiling in your vegetables.

7

POST A STORAGE CHEATSHEET ON THE SIDE OF YOUR FRIDGE

Though our newsletter is a great resource, you won't always want to go look it up. Having a one-page veggie storage guide posted somewhere easy to see will save you time during busy weeks.





## **Practice micro- prepping on CSA day & throughout the week**

A lot of CSA members begin prepping veggies right away the night they bring home their CSA box. They find that certain techniques like peeling and/or cutting the carrots, slicing the celery, cucumbers, or bell peppers right away not only makes life easier, but also leads to their families grabbing veggies as snacks throughout the week.

We call these "micro-prep" moments and they are a huge way to stay on top of your produce and not get bogged down by the knife work inherent in cooking with lots of veggies.





# Invest in the right kitchen tools

Like any activity, cooking isn't very fun without the proper equipment. Here is a list of the kitchen items we use most for cooking up our veggies.

1

A GOOD KNIFE (PREFERABLY A CHEF'S KNIFE THAT IS CONSISTENTLY SHARPENED)

Food prep is so much faster and safer when you spend the money for a high quality knife. To find the best knife for you, it's best to go to a kitchen store and try them out by hand. It's all about how it feels in your hand.

2

SHEET PANS OR BAKING SHEETS

When you join a CSA, one of the exit strategies you learn about is "the Sheet Pan Meal." This allows you to throw your entire meal (meat, veggie, starch) onto one sheet pan, and prep a meal in 30-45 minutes in one place. The sheet pan also comes in handy to help you freeze clumps of blanched greens or berries. I also use it as a "lid" for large skillet on the stove.

The sheet pan should have a lip and be large enough to handle large portions of food. Make sure it can fit in your freezer.

3

A CAST-IRON SKILLET OR OTHER PAN THAT CAN GO FROM STOVETOP TO OVEN

4

DEBBY MEYER GREEN BAGS FOR EASY STORAGE

These reusable bags are a real CSA life saver. They are used almost universally by CSA members to help them store, organize, and lengthen the life of their veggies.

5

A VEGETABLE PEELER

This is a multi-purpose tool every home cook should have-- and spend the extra \$5 to get one that has a nice handle that feels comfortable in your hand. You will use this not only to peel veggies, but also to shave vegetables for salads.

6

A MANDOLIN OR VEGETABLE SLICER

The easiest way to thinly slice a bunch of vegetables for salad for the week is definitely with a mandolin. They're also great for matchsticking vegetables as well as making chips or fries.

7

SPLURGE ITEM: A FOOD PROCESSOR

Now this is the highest ticket item on the list and may not be something you invest in your first year, but over time most of our CSA members wind up getting one. They use it for making salsa, pesto, pizza dough, and pureeing items like soups and sauces. It's even a great tool for shredding carrots or cauliflower "rice."



# Learn how to identify your veggies



It can be hard to unpack things properly or store it correctly if you have no idea what the heck it is.

Every time we give you a less common vegetable or variety of a vegetable, we will reference it in our CSA newsletter with a photo so you can easily know what you are dealing with. Be sure to check this newsletter each week, so you can learn your veggies by season's end.

# Get (and stay) inspired

One of the most rewarding (and fun!) parts of being in a CSA is trying our new vegetables and new recipes! CSA is a great excuse to experiment with new techniques, and an amazing way to get more variety into your diet.

So don't just stick to old stand by recipes when there's a whole world of cooking to explore. Stay inspired throughout the CSA season by looking outside your own ideas or the cookbooks you've used for years. Instead, we suggest you:

1

CHECK OUT OUR CSA NEWSLETTER FOR RECIPES.

2

FIND A COUPLE FAVORITE BLOGS WHO USE A LOT OF FRESH, SEASONAL PRODUCE AND CONTINUALLY HEAD THERE FOR INSPIRATION.

3

TREAT YOURSELF TO A NEW COOKBOOK OR TWO EVERY CSA SEASON.



# Our favorite cookbooks & food blogs

## COOKBOOKS

*Six Seasons* by Joshua McFadden

*Bounty from the Box* by Mi Ae Lipe

*The Vegetable Butcher* by Cara Mangini

*How to Cook Everything* by Mark Bittman

*From Asparagus to Zucchini* by FairShare CSA Coalition

## BLOGS

101 Cookbooks

Alexandra's Kitchen

Dishing up the Dirt

Half Baked Harvest

Minimalist Baker

Naturally Ella

Smitten Kitchen

The Leek & The Carrot





# Try new things

One of the best things about being a part of a CSA is the opportunity to try new vegetables you aren't familiar with and experimenting with different combinations of food and flavors. Keep things extra interesting by selecting recipes that aren't the kind of thing you usually would make.

Some of our more experienced CSA members like to intentionally select recipes that are outside their "standard wheelhouse" or that use a common vegetable in a different way. For example, instead of just roasting or grilling summer squash every week, opt for something unique like a squash pie.

# Take inventory & set priorities before the next CSA delivery

CSA can feel overwhelming when the vegetables just keep coming. When you're receiving a box week after week, things can really start to pile up.

Before the next week's box arrives, it's really important to take stock of the veggies you still have laying around and try to eat, wash, prep or even freeze those things that you know you likely won't eat within the "fresh window." These techniques will help you feel less overwhelmed when the next box arrives.





# Learn some tried & true exit strategies

No matter how great you are at enjoying your CSA share, staying inspired and using up your produce each week, there will be weeks where you feel like you just can't possibly keep up in the kitchen.

This is the time for an "exit strategy": quick, go-to methods to use up produce fast so you can prepare for the next batch of bounty!

We share our favorite exit strategies on the next few pages.





# Our Favorite Exit Strategies

1

WHIPPING UP A STIR FRY IS A GREAT WAY TO USE UP ODDS & ENDS BEFORE THE NEXT BOX ARRIVES.

2

ROAST IT! EVEN BETTER, EXPLORE THE ART OF THE SHEET PAN MEAL!

Whenever you don't know what to do with the last two vegetables left in your fridge, I urge you to give roasting a try. There is hardly a vegetable that doesn't taste amazing roasted and if you can turn it into a sheet pan meal, all the better! Google "sheet pan meals" if you aren't familiar. It is a serious game changer.

3

WHIP UP SOME PESTO

You can make pesto out of pretty much any green you receive from the farm (basil, kale, collards, spinach, green garlic, scallions, etc) .And if you make too much, it freezes up great!

4

TRY MAKING GREEN CUBES

At our farm, we love green cubes. This is where you take a bunch of blanched greens and puree them together and then put them into ice cube trays. Then add them to sauces or soups as you please.

5

## JUST GRILL IT!

When you aren't sure what to make with something or short on time- toss in some olive oil, salt, and pepper and grill it. Works great for MOST veggies (even some of the more unique ones).

Plus who doesn't love the simplicity of a summer dinner alfresco?

6

## IF ALL ELSE FAILS, THROW IT IN THE FREEZER

One of the absolute best ways to deal with produce you don't think you'll get to is utilize that freezer. You would be surprised how many vegetables can go straight into the freezer (no blanching or prep required): kale, spinach, chard, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, beets, peas, corn, onions, shredded zucchini. Toss them in freezer bags or freezer-proof containers and get them into the freezer.

Or, if you're feeling ambitious you can take things a bit further, If you have too much produce at any given time, chop it up and freeze or prep sauces for freezing so you can lessen your waste!

7

## PLAY AROUND WITH MEALS THAT CAN INCORPORATE TO FIT MANY VEGGIES

Think quiche, pizza, pasta, chili, tacos, spring rolls, scrambled eggs, etc.





# Preserving the harvest

Another great way to make the most of your CSA experience and lessen the amount of food waste is to learn some preservation techniques. We listed freezing as one of our exit strategies because it is one of the quickest and easiest ways to deal with excess produce. But that is not the only method of preservation! On the next page you will find a few of other CSA favorite preservation techniques.

# CSA Member Preservation Tips

## 1 SAVE YOUR SCRAPS FOR VEGGIE STOCK

Don't toss your scraps! Put them in a gallon-sized bag in the freezer and keep adding until full. Then in the fall or winter, add the veggies to a full pot of water, bring to a boil and let simmer at least 45 minutes and strain. Keep the liquid, toss the solids, and then you have delicious homemade vegetable stock for soups which you can freeze!

## 2 PLAY WITH OTHER SIMPLE TECHNIQUES LIKE FRIDGE PICKLES OR SALSA

## 3 EXPERIMENT WITH KIMCHI, KRAUTS AND OTHER FERMENTED PRODUCTS

A lot of our CSA members swear by fermentation. One of our favorite recipes is on the next page!

## 4 BATCH COOK AND FREEZE HALF

Take advantage of the abundance by making double batches of things and freezing half. It's so nice to have those meals prepped and ready for a busy night.

## 5 AS YOUR CONFIDENCE GROWS, BEGIN TO EXPERIMENT WITH VARIOUS CANNING METHODS



# Hillside Kimchi recipe

ADAPTED FROM FERMENTED  
VEGETABLES BY SHOCKEY &  
SHOCKEY

From the CSA Box or lonely corner of the  
crisper drawer:

- 1 head of any firm leafy thing (calls for cabbage, bok choy worked great)
- 1/4-1/2 cup shredded or thinly sliced root veg (calls for daikon, every other radish worked)
- 1/4-1/2 cup some other root veg, shredded or thinly sliced (calls for carrot, can use parsnip or whatever)
- 1 handful coarsely sliced green shoots (calls for scallions, we used leeks and shallots)

From the kitchen:

- 1/2 gallon pure-ish water (well water was no issue, avoid city water)
- 1/2 cup salt (calls for unrefined sea salt, kosher will do)
- 1/4 cup red pepper flakes (calls for gochugaru, regular kind works too)
- 2 1-quart, large mouth mason jars (clean but pristine, no antibacterial soap or bleach residue. I just carefully swirl boiling water in them.)
- 2 baby jars with lids that fit inside the momma jars (1-1.5 cup mason jars work great)



# Hillside Kimchi recipe (cont.)

From the green grocer:

- Cloves from 1/2 head of garlic, minced
- 1" ginger root, minced

1. Mix the salt and water in a large mixing bowl ... POOF: it's brine!
2. Clean, rinse, and trim, discarding dirty outer leaves, reserving 2 clean outer leaves, then halve or quarter the remaining head (remove core if cabbage)
3. Submerge in brine, weigh down with a water filled Ziploc, soak for for 6-8 hours
4. Drain, reserving at least 1 cup of the brine and setting aside the 2 whole leaves
5. Roughly chop, and toss back into the empty mixing bowl
6. Mix well the roots, shoots, ginger, garlic, and pepper flakes
7. Dump the mixture onto the leaf pile, massage together thoroughly until vibrantly pink (nitrile gloves are a good idea)
8. Pack into the mason jars, pressing out air pockets as you go, and adding brine if necessary to submerge (leave 2-3 inches open at the top, or it will bubble over)
9. Cover with the reserved whole leaves, and weight down with smaller, water-filled jars
10. Set in a cool dark place for about 10 days, checking every few days that it stays submerged (add brine if not) and that it's not making a huge mess.





# Know the risks & rewards

No “Beginner’s Guide to CSA” would be complete without bringing up the understood “contract” between farmer and member.

When you join a CSA, you are shaking the farmer’s hand and giving your word that you will stand behind him/her through thick and thin that season. You financially commit your dollars to their operation.

In return, your farmers will grow the best vegetables they can to make good on that investment. As your farmers we set out with a plan - and determine what will be in the box each week. We seed the crops and do our best to get them to harvest in the allotted time.

But Mother Nature is fickle. She can send too much rain, flea beetle infestations, or overly high temperatures that cause plants to bolt and go to seed. Seed may not germinate at the proper percentage, leaving us just shy of our harvest goals.

As farmers, we do our part to minimize the risks. We know how important it is to keep the soil healthy. When we tend to our soil, healthy plants follow -- leading to better disease resistance, better yields and better taste.

But every year, there is something that goes off course. As a member of a CSA farm, you ride this risk with the farmer.

When the fields are bountiful, you benefit in a share of that bounty. When the fields suffer due to circumstances out of our control, you take it in stride and stand by your farmer.

To have the very best experience with CSA, be sure you are 100% behind your farmer no matter what happens.

