

REAL SIMPLE | FOOD | SHOPPING & STORING

# How to Safely Shop at Your Local Farmers Markets This Summer

Stock up on fresh produce, support growers, and protect your community, all at the same time.

By **Kelsey Ogletree** | July 01, 2020



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## **Make a shopping list before you go**

We get it—spontaneously scooping up an unexpected, new-to-you veggie (daikon radishes, anyone?) to cook for dinner that night is half the fun of visiting a farmers market. However, now is not the time to aimlessly roam vendor stands. With public safety in mind, farmers markets such as TD Saturday Market in Greenville, S.C.—which is operating this summer at half-size (it typically boasts 75 vendors) and has rebranded as TD Essential Market for now—are putting up vendor maps on their websites and social media for shoppers to review ahead of their visit.

“When shoppers see a map prior to getting to the market, they know where the vendors are and what they will be offering, and it allows for that constant flow,” says Cameron Campbell, a special events coordinator with the City of Greenville who oversees the market.

Farmers markets are (thankfully!) starting to resume operations in certain spots around the country, but these favorite summer spots look and feel a lot different this year. It’s possible to still shop farmers markets safely during coronavirus, and as long as you feel comfortable, you should—they’re a primary source of income for many local farmers, after all, and offer some of the freshest produce.

Your local market may be open, but you should take some additional precautions before you grab your reusable bag and visit on a Saturday morning. For one, you’ll need to do your homework and plan ahead, probably much more than you’re used to, and it won’t be a social hour. Just remember: It’s all in the name of keeping health and safety top priority for both vendors and shoppers. With that in mind, here’s what to consider before you head out to scoop up armfuls of beautiful heirloom tomatoes and juicy, ripe berries.

## Shop with your eyes only

We're all used to being able to pick our own produce based on how it feels—tomatoes that give slightly to the touch, peaches that aren't squishy—but for now, it's hands-off when shopping farmers markets.

“We really need customers to avoid touching produce,” says Katie Davis, a board member of [The Market at Pepper Place](#) and director of operations at [Jones Valley Teaching Farm](#) (a vendor at the market) in Birmingham, Ala.

While it may seem odd, you'll need to place your trust in vendors to pick out the produce you want; ask (nicely) for what you're looking for. Then, hold your bag out and open it up for the vendor to gently place your items inside. (Davis says that, while environmentally friendly reusable bags are normally standard for shopping farmers markets, it's OK to use single-use containers right now for everyone's safety.)

## Plan extra time

Limiting the number of shoppers helps to keep farmers markets safer, much like regular [grocery stores are doing](#). However, this means you may need to plan more time for your visit in case you have to wait in line to enter the market.

At TD Essential Market, for example, event staff have turned the formerly open market into an enclosed one with only two access points, Campbell says. Staff control the number of people who go in and out, with the entrance and exit at the same location. With only 80 to 100 people allowed in at a time, depending on the time of day, shoppers are having to wait in socially distanced lines for their turn (and sometimes it takes a while, considering about 2,000 shoppers have turned out on Saturdays since the market reopened in early June). Standing 6 feet apart can also make it tricky to see exactly where the line is, so be patient and collaborative with fellow shoppers while you wait.

## **Do as the vendors do**

Mask requirements differ from state to state, but the best practice when shopping farmers markets is to wear a mask—especially if all the vendors are doing so. At TD Essential Market, all vendors are required wear masks and it's recommended they wear gloves; as such, all shoppers are kindly asked to do the same.

“It's important to mirror those practices of the growers and the things they're comfortable with,” Davis says. “If your vendor is wearing a mask, it's proper and polite to be doing that, too.”

## **Think ahead about payment**

Check to see if you can pay digitally before you go. In an effort to transition away from a cash-based system, many vendors at The Market at Pepper Place have transitioned to a cashless app or are encouraging customers to prepay online whenever possible. TD Essential Market is actively promoting preordering from vendors, too; when you opt for this route, your order will be bagged with your name on it, ready for pickup, Campbell says. If you must pay with cash, aim to bring exact change for your order to avoid extra money handling.

## **Eat ahead of time**

Tasting a slice of crisp apple or biting into a tangy blueberry is an excellent way to ensure you'll love what you buy. But sorry—no snacking as you browse this year. Markets have widely suspended any sampling of products and vendors serving food prepared on-site at farmers markets for the time being.

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## **Don't hang out**

As delightful as it sounds to spend a Saturday browsing produce stands and having leisurely chats with vendors and neighbors, this isn't the year for it.

“From the vendor, market, and customer perspectives, this has been a huge upset, because farmers markets are centers of community, as well as the place you go to get your produce,” Davis says. The bottom line right now: Though it feels anti-social, it's important to maintain a “get in and get out” mentality.

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## **Think of other ways to support vendors**

Farmers markets and vendors have increased expenses this year after having to pay for additional signage for communicating social distancing requirements, renting hand-washing stations, and having PPE supplies on hand with items like paper towels and sanitizer. If you want to support them beyond scooping up your weekly produce haul, you could consider hosting some kind of drive to raise money or offer to donate supplies to help offset their costs, Davis suggests.

A simple show of gratitude can go a long way, too. “Being a grower is already a stressful job, and this adds a layer of uncertainty on top of [coping] with weather, soil, bugs, etc.,” Davis says. She suggests sending an email of thanks to a vendor you purchased something from or helping to promote vendors by sharing about them on social media to encourage sales.