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Labor of love

[Cassie Pence](#)

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EDWARDS - Most corn loses half its natural sugars by converting them into starch within 24 hours after being picked. What this means for summer barbecues is corn with half its flavor, too.

To maximize taste of Colorado crops this summer, local chef Jenna Johansen recommends shopping at farmers' markets to buy locally and organically grown fruits and vegetables, and if you can't find produce that meets both criteria - go for the local, she said. Johansen is the chef of Dish, scheduled to open in September above eat! drink! in Edwards.

"Produce from the grocery store is picked, packed, shipped on a boat or a on a plane, and then sits in a hangar," Johansen said last week at the [Edwards Farmers' Market](#). "By the time you eat it, it's been out of the ground a long time."

At farmers' markets, on the other hand, farmers usually pick that morning - when the produce is ripe from the vine - before driving only a few hours and setting up their tent. The freshness is visible.

"See these carrot tops," Johansen said, pulling at the bright wispy greens. "At the store, they're usually slimy and wilted. And these beets - these still have dirt on them. It's fantastic."

Cherries are at their peak and will soon be gone for the rest of the summer.

Preston

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Produce at farmers markets are usually picked the day before or the morning of the market to ensure maximum freshness.

Preston Utley/Vail Daily

Other signs of freshness, as Johansen pointed out, were coming from the cantaloupes. To tell whether or not a cantaloupe is ripe, look at the slip, or stem end of the melon, she said. The stem end should have no stem remaining and should have a smooth depression. Under-ripe melons have to be tugged from the vine, leaving a depression with a rough edge or even with part of the green vine.

"This one just fell right off the vine," she said, moving her hand over the smooth, "full slip."

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For vegetables, like zucchini and squash, Johansen said to look for firmness, brightness in color and skin that is intact and has not been attacked by bugs.

"Although bugs are something you're going to see a little bit more at a farmers' market," she said, adding people can't be afraid of little imperfections. "That's what gives them their intrinsic beautiful characteristics."

But the most effective way to tell which produce is at its peak, is to simply ask the farmer who grew it. Ask him what's best, ask him what's going to be great next week, Johansen said, you should even ask him how he would cook it.



Don't be shy when asking farmers about their produce. They can tell you what's best and what will be even better the following week.

Preston Utley/Vail Daily

"The farmers' market is the final culmination of all the love and themselves they have put into their farm," Johansen said. "They're proud of what they're selling, and they want you to ask questions. They will tell you what's best. It's not a secret."

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