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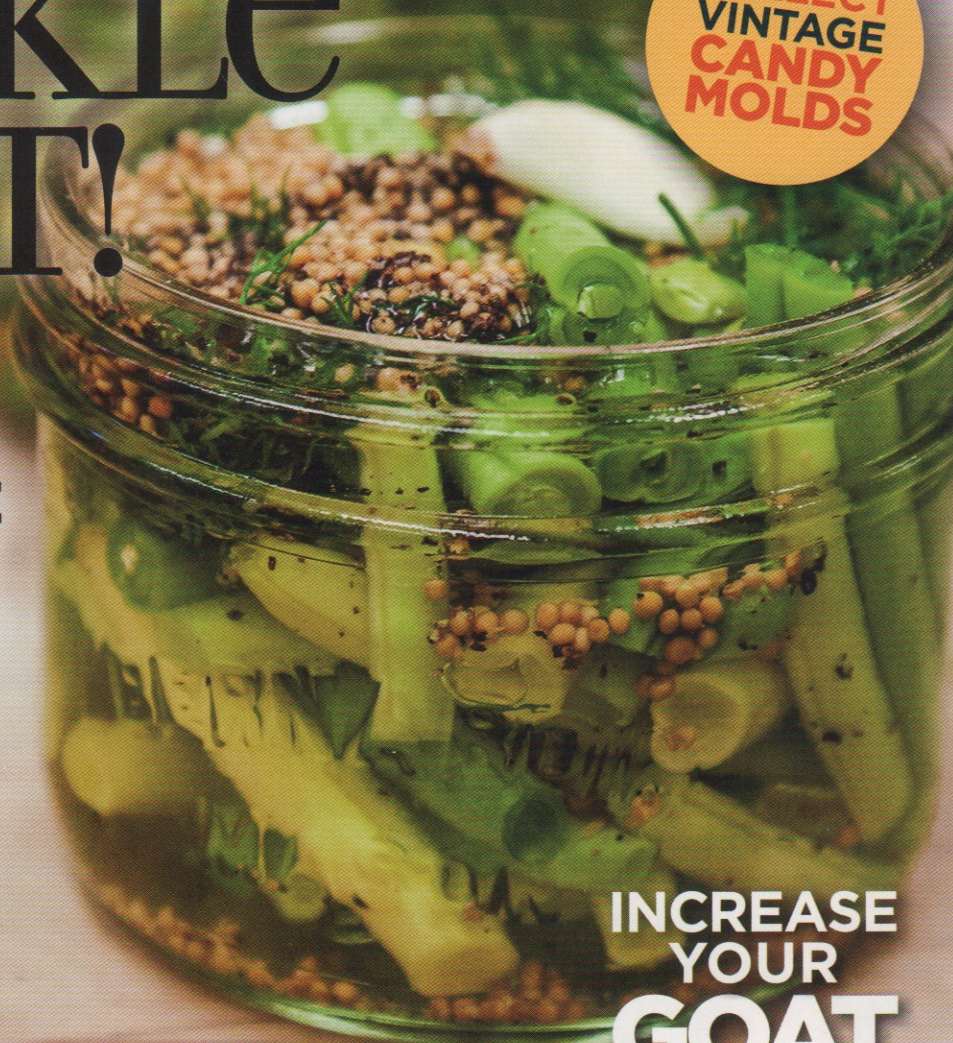
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IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES FOR
ENJOYING THE GREAT OUTDOORS



BY NANCY MANN JACKSON

Farm-fresh Feasts

As more people become interested in eating local, "farm to table" has become a commonplace phrase, from restaurant marketing materials to discussions of school lunches. But the most authentic way to experience the pleasure of the farm-to-table concept is by actually dining on a farm.

Aside from your own kitchen table, there's a growing number of places where you can relish true farm-to-table dining without doing all the cooking or inevitable cleaning yourself. Here are some of the most interesting places across the country to experience dinner on a farm.

Northern Fare

REMICK COUNTRY DOCTOR MUSEUM AND FARM (www.remickmuseum.org) in Tamworth, N.H., serves farm-fresh dinners every weekend from May through November. In a family-friendly atmosphere, guests can enjoy classic New England fare, much of which consists of heirloom varieties. You can also buy fresh heirloom vegetables, herbs and flowers at the on-site farmstand.

In addition to dining on vegetables grown from seed varieties that are more than 100 years old, you can learn

to cook using historical food-preparation methods. The farm's Hearthside Dinners, offered four times per year, are intimate gatherings of 12 adult guests, who help prepare a traditional 19th-century dinner cooked on an open hearth. Museum guides dressed in period costumes teach guests about food preparation, ingredients and cooking tools of the 19th century as everyone gathers family-style at the hearth to enjoy a hearty, farm-fresh meal. (Learn more about hearth cooking in "Playing with Fire" on page 20.)

PRIMO (www.primorestaurant.com) in Rockland, Maine, started as a farm with a garden, hens and pigs but is now a full-scale, farm-based restaurant. The restaurant cooks and serves foods raised on the property, including honey, fruits, vegetables, eggs, edible flowers, fresh chicken, and house-cured and -smoked meats. The kitchen, led by James Beard Award-winning chef Melissa Kelly, offers a regularly changing seasonal menu.

Diners can choose from a variety of table settings with farm views, including numerous rooms with nooks and crannies for private meals; formal dining parlors available by reservation; and larger, more casual seating areas available for walk-in patrons.



COURTESY SUNCREST GARDENS FARM

Southern Comfort

RIVERPLAINS FARM (www.riverplainsfarm.com) in Strawberry Plains, Tenn., offers visitors a private, sit-down dinner for parties of any size. Dining tables can be set up by the Holston River, which flows through the farm; near the barns, where visitors can watch animals grazing; in the garden by the farmhouse; or atop a hill with views of the farm and surrounding mountains.

In addition to enjoying a meal prepared with eggs, chicken, grassfed beef and pork, and vegetables raised on site, visitors can tour the 400-acre family farm and take part in seasonal foxhunts.

Midwestern Flavor

SUNCREST GARDENS FARM (www.suncrestgardensfarm.com) in Cochrane, Wis., offers farm-made, wood-fired pizza—takeout or picnic-style—on Thursday and Friday nights during spring and summer. While their pizzas are made with as many items from their farm and other local farms as possible, they do offer pizzas with non-local items, such as olives and artichokes. Personalized pizzas are available for children, and gluten-free crust is available by request.

Customers say the farm-fresh pizzas offer a tasty alternative to fast-food versions, and the pizza nights are an ideal family activity for warm-weather dinners. Diners who want to enjoy their pizza on the farm, picnic-style, are required to bring their own picnic gear, including plates, utensils, and chairs or blankets. "We only have a couple picnic tables so the idea is to bring your own camp chair and find a seat in the yard amongst the flower gardens," says farmer Heather Secrist.

In addition to casual pizza nights, Suncrest Gardens Farm also offers occasional multi-course dinners, prepared from food grown on site and served in a charming, rustic barn. In addition to farming, Secrist is a culinary enthusiast and personally prepares all the meals.

THE CHEF'S GARDEN (www.chefs-garden.com), located just outside Cleveland in Huron, Ohio, is a long-time family farm that is now affiliated with the Culinary Vegetable Institute, located in Milan, Ohio, and dedicated to providing a retreat and learning center to facilitate knowledge-sharing between chefs and farmers outside of the restaurant setting. Growing more than 600 varieties of heirloom vegetables, microgreens, micro herbs and edible flowers, the Chef's Garden is "the premier grower of sustainable vegetables to the country's top chefs and restaurants," says farmer Lee Jones.

As a result of the Chef's Garden's relationships with leading chefs, it offers visitors a unique opportunity to participate in growing, harvesting and processing, Jones says. An important part of that experience is partaking in Earth to Table dinners, which are hosted each month at the Culinary Vegetable Institute. Each of these multi-course meals features a different talented chef, who designs a menu and prepares the food based on the current harvest.

In addition to enjoying chef-prepared, farm-grown food on site, the Earth to Table dinners give diners unique public access to the one-of-a-kind institute, allowing guests to tour the garden, which is usually reserved for chefs only, says April Ingle, communications coordinator of Positively Cleveland, a destination marketing organization.

Western Palate

TIERRA VEGETABLES (www.tierravegetables.com) in Healdsburg, Calif., hosts on-farm dinners in partnership

with local restaurants. Dinners are prepared by chefs who regularly use ingredients grown sustainably on local farms, and menus are developed based on foods that are currently available at Tierra, including heirloom dried beans, corn meal and vegetables.

Reservations are required and are usually handled by the partnering restaurant.

Diners are served at open-air tables surrounded by the farm's many growing grains and vegetables.

COURTESY THE CULINARY VEGETABLE INSTITUTE



THE LYONS FARMETTE (www.lyonsfarmette.com) in Lyons, Colo., goes beyond growing flowers, vegetables and herbs for its regularly scheduled farm dinners by offering weekend classes and workshops on topics, such as keeping bees, building a cobb oven, brewing beer or making cheese. For those interested in farm-to-table dinners, the Lyons Farmette offers an array of options.

Each season, the farm hosts wood-fired pizza nights, as well as several multi-course dinners featuring chefs from local restaurants who specialize in sustainable, local food. Meals are served at long farm tables under the trees.

Worldly Appeal

To help people nationwide reconnect to the origins of their food and pay tribute to the locals who cultivate and produce it, several organizations now offer traveling farm dinners.

OUTSTANDING IN THE FIELD (www.outstandinginthefield.com) holds a North American Tour each year, setting its signature "long table" for more than 80 different meals on almost as many different farms across the country.

"Since 1999, Outstanding in the Field's mission has been to get people out to the farm to experience the places where their food comes from and meet the people who cultivate it," says Lisa Supple, OIF spokesperson. "At each stop, we partner with fabulous local chefs who create five-course al fresco meals in our roving pop-up kitchen."

Ingredients for the farm dinners are almost all local, and before the meal begins, guests are treated to a tour of the hosting farm. Then everyone settles in—farmers, producers, chefs and guests—to share a memorable meal together. *

Freelance journalist Nancy Mann Jackson writes regularly about food and farming, and raises vegetables and chickens in Alabama with her husband and three boys.