

The Locavore Revolution

*Nourishing Mind, Body, and Spirit:
Mindful Eating and Going Local*



IN 2007, the Oxford American Dictionary named locavore the word of the year, reflecting the growing awareness among Americans of where their food comes from. A “locavore” is defined as one who consumes foodstuffs that are regionally grown or produced as it becomes seasonally available, usually to preserve flavor, strengthen community, and minimize environmental impact. Originally, “regionally grown” meant within a 100-mile radius of your home, but as the popularity of the movement has spread the meaning has become more elastic. Now, self-proclaimed locavores will eat regionally along geographically defined boundaries — mountains or lakes, for instance; limit themselves to food grown domestically; or make the occasional exception to the “local” rule by purchasing specialty items such as chocolate, coffee, tea, wine, or spices. There are many reasons why people become locavores — from political activism to a desire for more nutritious food — but for practitioners of the Old Ways, there are a multitude of unique benefits to “going local.”

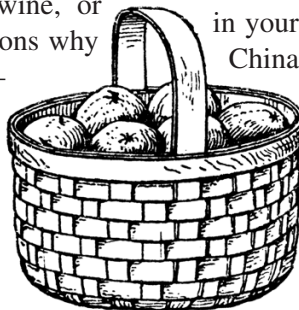
Preserving Life Force

Locavores often point out that food that must travel great distances over long periods of time is often less nutritionally valuable than food harvested locally and consumed fresh. Local food, they argue, is better for you. Practitioners of the Old Ways may agree but also worry about the loss of life force or vital energy. The minute a fruit is picked its life force begins to diminish. It becomes less and less vital until finally the life force is gone. Food that must travel a great distance is therefore deficient both nutritionally and vitally.



Seasonal Eating and the Wheel of the Year

Practically any and every kind of vegetable and fruit is available to us year round, divorcing us from the knowledge that each food has its season. If apples or zucchini are not currently growing in your region, they are growing in China or Argentina and can thus be shipped to your local supermarket. Not only is this practice bad for the global environment (the average American meal travels 1500 miles, emitting





tons of carbon dioxide and other pollutants along the way), but it also creates a dysfunctional relationship with the Wheel of the Year. Consuming locally grown foods helps you participate in the seasons unfolding around you, not halfway across the globe. Pagans know better than most that all things have their season, and that every ending is a new beginning. Each Sabbat marks both the end and the start of time, an unending, unbroken wheel. Our actions, practices, and rituals help to not only honor our place on this wheel but also to move it forward. Why not have our eating habits do the same thing?

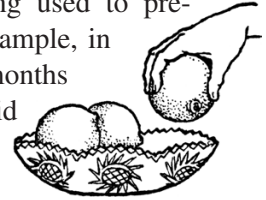
Fortunately, finding locally grown seasonal fruits and vegetables as well as locally produced wares such as cheese, bread and beer is becoming easier as demand grows. Major metropolitan areas as well as smaller cities and towns across the country now host farmers' markets where farmers can sell direct to the community. These markets often have the added benefit of feeding the neediest of the community – unsold stock is usually donated to area food banks. Many supermarket chains have also started offering local fare.

When moving the Wheel along its path, one must look forward. When your local farms are at peak harvest, remember to buy extra large batches of whatever is fresh and cheap to preserve for the long, lean winter months

ahead. Canning, jarring, pickling, salting, drying, and freezing are all preservation methods to be considered when looking forward.

Balance in All Things

“Eating seasonally” can go beyond the raw materials ingested to extend to the method of cooking used to prepare them. For example, in the hot summer months one wants to avoid adding yet more heat. One's food



should therefore be cooked as little as possible – which shouldn't be a problem considering how many juicy fruits become ripe for picking during these months. Similarly, the cold winter months demand slow-cooked, warm, and hearty foods like soups and breads – easily assembled from frozen veggies and stored grains. In general, hot should be balanced with cold, cold with hot, dry with wet and so forth, so that your meals as well as your energies may achieve balance.

Land Spirits

Nothing says “locavore” more than growing your own food. Cultivating a garden will not only provide you with as much food as you can coax from the soil, but it will also help you cultivate a relationship with your land spirits. These spirits go by many names but no matter what they are called, it is in your best interest to keep them happy. These spirits are closer to you than the





Gods and Goddesses inhabiting the celestial dome and are therefore more likely to cause troublesome mischief if you neglect or abuse them. However, keep them happy and you gain powerful allies who will protect and nurture the tasty fruits (and vegetables!) of your labor.

One way to keep your land spirits happy is to make regular offerings. When you are weeding or watering acknowledge the spirits as you work. Sing them a song of praise and thank them for their help in protecting the garden. Before harvesting acknowledge the role your land spirits played in growing and thank them for it. Remember



to give something back to the garden after harvest – return nutrients back to the earth by composting garden and kitchen scraps.

Of course, not everyone has access to land to cultivate. If you find yourself in a city or dense urban area, fear not! There are still plenty of opportunities to commune with the land. There are many innovative ways to garden within a small space. Community gardens allow city dwellers to cultivate their own patch miles from the country. Many farms now offer Community Supported Agriculture programs or CSAs, where people can exchange money or work on the farm for a share of the harvest. Window boxes and window farms (soil-less, hydroponics schemes)

can also be employed to grow herbs, lettuce, or edible flowers inside all year long. Whatever your space restrictions, there are opportunities to participate in the cycle of planting, nurturing, and harvesting food.

Bringin' it Home

Becoming a locavore is beneficial in many ways. Locavorism nurtures body, soul, and community – however, it is not always possible to remain a strict locavore. For example, the state of Rhode Island does not produce enough food within the state to feed all of its citizens. If everyone decided to eat local, there would simply not be enough to sustain everyone.



Furthermore, locally produced food tends to be more expensive than what is found in grocery stores, partly because local food reflects the real cost of agriculture while agribusinesses are funded by government subsidies and externalize much of the cost of production. But the practical limits should not destroy the idealistic sentiment of locavorism: that we should all be fully engaged with the food we eat. We should be aware of where our food comes from and who benefits from its consumption. We cannot all be strict locavores, but we can all strive to be more aware of the origins of our food.

– SHANNON MARKS

