



Local Harvest

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Features

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Local Farm Profile: Conestoga Garden Produce

Many happy customers keep going back to Conestoga Garden Produce and it's not hard to figure out why! The farm, owned by George S. Martin, is well situated at 1228 Northfield Drive just north of Conestoga, with an open-air tent conveniently located by the roadside. A charming blackboard sign alerts passerby's to the wide array of local products currently available. The tent market is usually manned by George's mother Mary who offers friendly advice and words of wisdom to inquiring customers.

Open seasonally from May to November, Conestoga Garden Produce features fresh-from-the-farm vegetables and fruits such as strawberries, raspberries, sweet corn, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, apples, pumpkins, squash and lots and lots of zucchini! Also available are seasonal cut flowers, bedding plants, mums as well as a full selection of homemade relishes, pickles, jams and jellies. Just last year George's sisters began baking delicious homemade pies and cookies as an added attraction to the market stand. Additional offerings at Conestoga include local honey and maple syrup which are available year round. Between the months of November and May customers can drive all the way down the lane to the house to purchase these sweet products—a jaunt well worth taking!

George has operated his farm since the early '80s, beginning with potatoes and only a few other vegetables. But he is certainly no stranger to farming. George grew up on the same parcel of land in the family homestead located just behind his current dwelling. His parents were originally dairy farmers but eventually switched to produce because of BSE. George's mother sold cooked cheese (a Mennonite specialty) and apple butter at market for 25 years. "I always enjoyed dealing with customers at the local St. Jacobs Market," recounts Mary whose sociable



Their roadside sign says it all!

nature makes her well suited to tending the current farm gate stand.

Another son, George's brother Solomon Martin, owns Sunny Slopes Farm located just across the road. While Conestoga Garden Produce offers earlier season produce and baked goods, Sunny Slopes specializes more in fall crops and harvest decorations. In addition to their farm wagon at 1183 Northfield, Sunny Slopes continues to sell at both the Kitchener and St. Jacobs Farmers' Market.

George feels fortunate to be able to farm the parcel of land he grew up on. "In particular I enjoy being



Local Farm Profile continued



Zucchini are one of the easiest vegetables to grow in temperate climates. One way to control overabundance is to harvest the bright yellow edible flowers (pictured at left).

able to work outdoors,” he says. In total he farms 17 acres of picturesque land, where he lives with his wife Hannah and six kids ranging in age from 5 to 21. George first began selling melons, squash and pumpkins at EPAC (Elmira Produce Auction Cooperative) and eventually opened up his produce stand at the end of his laneway approximately five years ago. While the lion’s share of produce is grown on the farm, George augments his offerings with Niagara peaches, nectarines and cherries when they are in season. Two recent and very popular additions to Conestoga Garden Produce are Nancy Gingrich’s line of *Kountry Kitchen Cupboard* preserves and Brubacher’s hot jams.

Early in the season before his own tomatoes were ready George was selling *Elmira’s Own* tomatoes from Floralane Produce. He was most amused recently when a patron inquired, “Are these tomatoes Mexican or *Elmira’s Own*?” Increasingly, he has noticed that customers are wanting to know if products are local and grown on the farm.

One of the more prolific vegetables throughout the summer months is zucchini. George has been planting zucchini every two to three weeks

since early summer and must harvest it daily. As with all members or the squash family, zucchini is susceptible to some pest and disease problems but for the most part they are fairly easy to grow. The trick, says George, is to pick them before they get too big. The ideal size is less than eight inches in length and less than one and a half inches in diameter. Both yellow and green zucchini can be purchased at Conestoga Garden Produce from July to October. George has even had some more adventurous customers requesting the edible zucchini flowers.

Conestoga Garden Produce offers it all—convenience, customer service, and a wide selection of delicious farm-fresh products. It’s no wonder folks keep coming back!

Conestoga Garden Produce, 1228 Northfield Dr, is open Monday to Saturday, 9:30 am to 6:00 pm Monday to Saturday. Produce is available May to November; honey and maple syrup available year round. For more information please call 519-664-0570. ♦



Finding Local Zucchini in Waterloo Region

Many local farm markets in Waterloo Region sell zucchini throughout the summer months. Why not consult Foodlink’s new *Buy Local! Buy Fresh!* Map for a listing of farms close by that grow and sell zucchini. Please call for hours and availability.

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|---|--|--|
| <p>4 J. Steckle Heritage Homestead
811 Bleams Rd. Kitchener
519-748-4690
www.stecklehomestead.ca</p> | <p>37 Gmach Produce
1381 Huron Rd., New Dundee
519-894-1834
*find us at The Kitchener Market</p> | <p>46 Martin’s Family Fruit Farm
1420 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo
519-664-2750
www.martinsapples.com</p> |
| <p>35 Diversity Gardens
1528 Notre Dame Dr, St. Agatha
519-885-9584
www.cogwaterloo.ca</p> | <p>38 Herrle’s Country Farm Market
1243 Erb’s Road West, St. Agatha
519-886-7576
www.herrles.com</p> | <p>60 Brubacher’s Produce
1562 Halm Rd.
West Montrose
519-664-3214</p> |
| <p>36 Fertile Ground Market Garden
1560 Carmel-Koch Rd.
St. Agatha
519-569-8690
*find us at The Kitchener Market
www.fertilegroundcsa.com</p> | <p>40 Pfenning’s Organic Vegetables
1209 Waterloo St., Baden
519-662-3468
www.pfenningsfarms.ca</p> | <p>62 Conestoga Garden Produce
1228 Northfield Dr.
Conestogo
519-664-0570</p> |
| <p>42 Windy Lane Acres
1041 Huron St., New Hamburg
519-662-3889</p> | <p>75 Winroe Gardens
221 Katherine St. North
Winterbourne
519-664-0556</p> | |



A Zest for Zucchini

One of the easiest plants to grow in the backyard garden is zucchini, and it amazes me every year how quickly a small seed grows into a vine whose primary mission, it would seem, is to reach the far end of the garden in as short a time as possible. While the vines shoot across the ground, climbing anything in their way, the leaves grow ever larger shading all that lies beneath. Then, seemingly overnight, the huge, bright yellow flowers appear, a pollination beacon to all nectar-loving bees. Within days, the beginnings of the botanical zucchini fruit appear. If ignored for more than a few sunny days, those sweet green cylinders turn into rotund, stringy monsters whose final destination in my garden, more than likely, is the top of the compost heap.

Zucchini, *Cucurbita pepo*, is a summer squash, one member of the cucumber and melon family. For millennia, inhabitants of Central and South America have been eating hundreds of different varieties of summer squash, which were introduced to Europe by sixteenth century explorers. However, the zucchini we know today is a relatively new squash, developed from the closely related *Cocozelle* in Italy during the late nineteenth century.

Numerous Varieties

In case you believe that all zucchinis are created equal...think again. Although most commercially produced zucchinis resemble cucumbers in size, shape, and colour, round varieties are gaining popularity in market gardens and back yards. Varieties like *Eight Ball* are sweeter and denser than their oblong cousins and less prolific in their fruit production. As new varieties are created every year, the home gardener can experiment with space saving plants (such as *Spacemiser*) for small gardens or containers, as well as mini zukes (*Bush Baby*) that are glossy green with pale green stripes.

Generally, zucchini have smooth, thin skin that is either green or yellow in colour. Increasingly, however, the zucchini-phile can find striped or speckled varieties, and even some Italian types with ribbed skin (*Romanesco*). For those of us who like to make use of as much of a plant as possible, zucchini flowers (like those from all squash) are edible and often used in French and Italian cooking. Depending on the country you live in, or immigrated from, you may have a particular fondness for certain varieties or sizes ranging from baby gourmet to the more generously-sized. Ethnic recipes depend on using traditional ingredients to reliably bring out authentic flavour and texture in a dish. If your recipe calls for chunks of zucchini, you will likely prefer a narrow, dense, nutty flavoured variety. However, if you intend on scooping out the cavity and stuffing it, you will look for a wider, softer variety. When the shredded, green skin contributes to the visual appeal of grandma's zucchini bread, then a golden variety will simply not do.



Zucchini are a member of the summer squash family and come in a wide assortment of shapes and colours.

Zucchini Around the World

If your garden is overflowing with zucchini, rest assured that there are plenty of ways to avoid sending your harvest to the compost pile. Take some tips from these old world cuisines:

In Italy, zucchini pieces are breaded and pan-fried. *Fiori di zucca* are flowers that are battered and fried in olive oil.

In France, zucchini is a key ingredient in *ratatouille*, a summer stew that includes onions, tomatoes, eggplant, garlic, onion and regional herbs.

In Turkey, zucchini forms the basis of *mücver*, pancakes made with shredded zucchini, flour and eggs that are lightly fried and served with a yogurt dip.

In Lebanon, minced meat, rice, herbs and spices are stuffed into the hollowed out interior or, better yet, the entire cavity of another summer squash, the coussa.

In Greece, the zucchini flowers are filled with local cheeses or a rice mixture, then

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deep fried or baked in tomato sauce. *Boureki* is a layered pie made of zucchini, potatoes, ricotta and mint.

In Bulgaria, zucchini is sliced or grated and covered with a mixture of eggs, cheese, yogurt, flour and dill.

What to Look For

Whether you are at the market or standing above your own patch, look for zucchini that are firm with no bruises or soft spots. Generally speaking, they should be about 20cm in length, but of course that depends on their final culinary destination. If you have more squash than can be humanly consumed within one day, store it unwashed in the refrigerator for up to one week. Zucchini are prone to chilling damage which shows as sunken pits in the surface of the fruit, especially when brought up to room temperature after cool storage. If after one week, there are still zucchini overflowing not only the crispers but every nook and cranny within the refrigerator, go ahead and freeze them. Blanch slices for two minutes, or grated zucchini for one minute, plunge into cold water, drain, and pack into freezer bags or containers. These are great for adding to stews, breads, muffins, and pasta sauces.

For the sake of enhancing flavour, colour and nutrition, always leave the peel on when making dishes with zucchini. As a whole vegetable, it is a very good source of vitamins B6, C, K, riboflavin and folate as well as the minerals magnesium, manganese and potassium. One cup (113g) of sliced, raw zucchini provides 18 calories, 0g fat, 4g carbohydrate, 1g fibre, and 1g protein.

Other vegetables in the summer squash family include pattypan, scallopini, tinda, yellow crookneck, and vegetable marrow. When perusing your local farmers' markets or seed catalogues, look for some of the lesser known summer squashes and find out more about their origins. If you love to cook, then you may be inspired to try new national and regional recipes that feature these vegetables. You are probably not going to believe me but I will say it anyways....contrary to popular belief, you can never have too many zucchini or any other summer squash. It's just a matter of living – and eating – in the moment and being inventive in the kitchen. And when the creative juices have been depleted, don't forget that the freezer is the zucchini gardener's best friend. ♦

Zucchini Ribbon Salad

Here's a great local recipe that's a little unconventional because it uses young raw zucchini. Feel free to throw in a few zucchini flowers if you are feeling adventurous!



Ingredients:

- 2 yellow zucchini
- 2 green zucchini
- 1 onion
- 2 apples
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 2 tsp salt
- 1/4 cup toasted wheat berries

Method:

Cut zucchini lengthwise as thin as possible. Peel and core apples and thinly slice along with the onion. Toss all the ingredients into a bowl. Drizzle with cider vinegar and sprinkle with salt. Pile finished salad high in the center of a shallow bowl or plate and sprinkle with wheat berries and a little more salt.

Makes 8 servings

Adapted from Food Network Canada 100-Mile Challenge

Did You Know?

Zucchini with the flowers attached are a sign of a truly delicious young fruit and are considered a delicacy by many Italians!



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