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## 8 Tips for Surviving Harvest Season at the CSA

By Brette Sember

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When I first signed up for our CSA, it was exciting to get fresh from the fields, organic food grown in my own town. I was, however, completely unprepared for the sheer volume and unpredictability of the CSA as a food source.

If you aren't careful, you can drown in the produce you bring home (and the guilt if you don't use it all). Your weekly CSA visit does not have to feel like an onslaught of the veggie police. Follow these tips to manage your bounty.

### Grocery shop after you pick up your CSA box.

Do this even if you think there is no way the CSA will have what you need. You don't want to buy something only to then get it again at the CSA the next day.

### Do your meal planning after you get your box.

Challenge yourself to use at least one CSA ingredient every night. While you might be in the mood for a big pot of chili, if there are no tomatoes that week, you aren't maximizing your share by going with your craving.

### Be a food sleuth.

Just what exactly is that thing shaped like a squash that's yellow on top with white and green stripes on the bottom? Your CSA will surprise you with produce you've never seen before. The first order of business is to figure out what everything is. It can help to post pics on social media and ask for input if you just don't know.

### Stay open to possibilities.

Before you joined you may never have had kohlrabi, tatsoi, or salad turnips. Joining a CSA requires a bit of fearlessness when it comes to vegetables and a willingness to Google recipes and then experiment. Just because you've never had it doesn't mean it won't be good.

### Plan time in your schedule for sorting and storing the food when you get home.

Wrap herbs and greens in damp paper towels and then place them in bags to make them last longer. Make sure your potatoes, garlic, and onions are completely dry before you store them to reduce rot. Separate things for the fridge into individual bags (carrots in one, beets in another, beans in another) so they stay fresh longer. Cut the tops off your carrots to keep them crisp longer. Cook down greens like spinach and chard to reduce the space they take up and so they can be added to dishes or reheated later.

### Rotate the food in your fridge.

Especially in the heavy harvest season you'll find it's hard to use everything up before your next box is ready. For example, if you bring home carrots every week you may have a hard time finishing the previous week's bunch before you've got another one to add to the crisper. Put the new items in the back and the old ones in the front so they will get used first.

### Get freezer-friendly.

The sheer bounty of what you receive can be ridiculous, so the more you can save for later, the better off you will be. Soup is a great solution (eat some and freeze some). Puree and freeze herbs in ice cube trays with a bit of oil then store in a plastic bag. Cook, chop, and freeze spinach and kale for use all year. Cook and freeze fruit for use in pies or cobblers. Grate zucchini and freeze for use in breads and cakes. If you make veggie-heavy casseroles like vegetable lasagna, make one to freeze.

### Accept that there will be waste.

Honestly, there will be some food you or family members simply won't like. Don't torture yourself by eating it if it makes you miserable. Remember that you're still allowed to go out for meals occasionally even if you have a fridge full of veggies calling your name. If you chain yourself to your fridge you're going to resent the CSA. You also must just accept that you can't use everything up before it goes bad and it's ok. Forgive yourself.

*Brette Sember is the author of The Original Muffin Tin Cookbook and The Gluten-Free Guide to Travel.*

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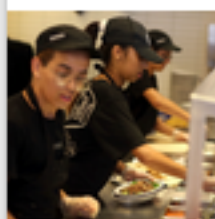
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