



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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EATING FRESH DURING WINTER'S FREEZE: SENATOR RITCHIE'S WEEKLY COLUMN

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Whether they're from the backyard or your local farmers market, during the warmer months, there's nothing better than eating fresh fruits and vegetables. From fresh berries and corn to apples and zucchini, while it's easier to get your hands on healthy, locally grown foods during spring, summer and fall, it can be somewhat of a challenge when winter hits.

Luckily, despite the colder temperatures, there are still ways you can continue to reap the benefits of eating locally grown fruits and vegetables. Here are some suggestions for filling your kitchen with healthy foods as winter continues:

Join a CSA: By becoming a member of a Community Supported Agriculture program—known as a CSA—you can stay stocked with healthy, locally grown foods from farmers year-round. Many CSA programs continue through the winter months, and one of the easiest ways to find a program near you is by visiting LocalHarvest's website at www.localharvest.com.

Work on your green thumb: Think you need an entire garden to grow food? Think again. With a little space, leafy vegetables like spinach and lettuce have the ability to grow well indoors during winter. Herbs, like basil and parsley also do well indoors too. Vegetables like peppers and tomatoes can also be grown inside, but may need extra lighting—such as grow lights, which can be purchased at most hardware stores.

Find a winter farmers market: Winter farmers markets are popping up at indoor locations throughout our region. They're the perfect place to find canned fruits and vegetables, meats, eggs, grains and other locally produced foods. Plus, by visiting an area farmers market, you aren't just taking home healthy food, you're supporting our local agriculture industry too.

As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I've been working to make it easier for consumers to access nutritious, local foods. From putting more New York-grown fruits and vegetables in school lunchrooms to working to expand the "Harvest NY" program, which aims to increase the availability of locally produced foods, you can learn more about my efforts on my website, www.ritchie.nysenate.gov.

While winter doesn't have the same colorful abundance of crops that other seasons do, there are still ways to get your fresh food fix. As the season continues, I hope you'll find ways to incorporate fresh, healthy and local flavors into your diet.