

the green party

In this delicious DIY guide, we throw a Thanksgiving potluck using locally grown food, proving that what's good for the earth can also satisfy your mouth

BY LISA BUTTERWORTH WITH CHRISTINA AMINI // PHOTOS BY ANNA WOLF



HOSTING A LOCAL-FOODS potluck is an awesome way to hang out with your ladies while saving the world one bite at a time. Eating local (also known as a “locavore” diet) often means using ingredients produced within a 150-mile radius from where you live, but this isn’t a strict definition. You can be as specific as eating within your county or as loose as buying items grown in your state or a convenient region. The benefits of eating locally are plentiful: Not only is the produce fresher, tastier, and more nutritious than its industrially produced counterpart, but eating food farmed close to home also saves a ton of energy wasted in the mass production and transportation of our edibles. I make a concerted effort to ride my bike and take public transit, so it seems a little crazy that the food on my plate has traveled an average of 1,500 miles just to get in my belly. And according to Steven L. Hopp, an environmental studies professor at Emory and Henry College, “If every U.S. citizen ate just one meal a week composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce, we would reduce our country’s oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week.” Talk about an easy change to make!

In addition, there’s another, less tangible advantage to eating local. This may sound a little hippie-dippy but hear me out: by consuming only what grows naturally and in your region, you reconnect to where your food actually comes from, the people who produce it, and the passing of seasons—which actually makes you *feel* better. It’s one thing to buy a bag of prewashed, impeccably packaged, who-knows-where-it-came-from spinach at the grocery store; it’s an entirely different experience to grab a bunch at the farmers’ market, dirt clods still clinging to the roots, passed from the hands of the farmer who dug it out of the ground herself.

But why keep the good feelings to yourself? Hosting a local-foods potluck not only inspires others to do the same but also makes for a great day of bonding with your gals over a fresh, delicious dinner. Thanksgiving, a day centered on sharing an enormous homemade meal with the people you love, is one of my favorite holidays. Now that I live 3,000 miles from my family, it’s a day for chowing down with my fantastic friends. So I decided to host a local-foods potluck with a Thanksgiving menu to make the most of the fall harvest. It was so easy and fun, you’ll want to organize one, too!

Dishin’ It Out: Planning a Potluck

As the hostess, it’s up to you to make the main dish, whether it’s turkey or a vegetarian option, and to delegate apps, sides, desserts, and drinks to guests. Tell them the goal of the meal is to see how local their dish can be, and make sure they take note of where their ingredients came from. Farmers’ markets are the best place to get your veggies—we got most of ours from the one at N.Y.C.’s Union Square, along with our bread, cheese, wine, and apple cider. But there are other alternatives as well—just get creative. Maybe your neighbor grows squash in her backyard. Or perhaps you know someone with a neighborhood garden plot who could spare a few veggies. If you plan ahead, you can sign up for a community-supported agriculture program and get local, seasonal produce every week. Oftentimes, Whole Foods will mark which veggies are from nearby farms, and even if you don’t have room for a garden, any gal with a green

thumb can grow herbs in a pot on her patio or deck (see sidebar).

Half the fun of grubbing locally is finding out about the farm that produced the delicious Brussels sprout on your fork or the person responsible for that pint of ice cream you devoured. Make some markers (we used folded pieces of cute craft paper) to denote what the dish is and where the ingredients came from. Going local is also a great way to discover indie businesses in your city, so explore your neighborhood for additional options. I stumbled upon Blue Marble—an eco-friendly ice creamery/shop owned by Alexis and Jennie, two cool gals on a quest for the perfect scoop—walking home one night. They use organic milk and cream from a New York dairy to make the most mouth-watering flavors I’ve ever encountered in a frozen tub. And I first met the Mast brothers at a flea market in Williamsburg, where I sampled the heavenly chocolate (wrapped in awesome vintage paper) they hand-make in Brooklyn. At this dinner, we also sipped Coney Island lagers from Schmaltz, a Brooklyn-based brewer, but you can even take it to the next level and try brewing your own.

For your local-foods meal, go as close to home as you can, but no matter how hard you try, some ingredients will be impossible to source nearby. That’s OK, you’ve gotta start somewhere. Don’t take the fun out of your party by being totally strict, unless you’re up for the challenge!



Menu

- Bread and cheese
- Maple-glazed acorn squash
- Green beans with onion sprinkles
- Golden-crust Brussels sprouts
- Turkey with gravy
- Sage, walnut, and dried-fig stuffing
- Rosemary-garlic mashed potatoes
- Cranberry sauce
- Pumpkin pie
- Vanilla ice cream with ginger-pear preserves
- Artisanal dark chocolate bars
- Hot apple cider
- Beer, red wine, and sparkling cider

Golden-Crusted Brussels Sprouts

Serves 4

24 small Brussels sprouts

1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for rubbing

Fine-grain sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

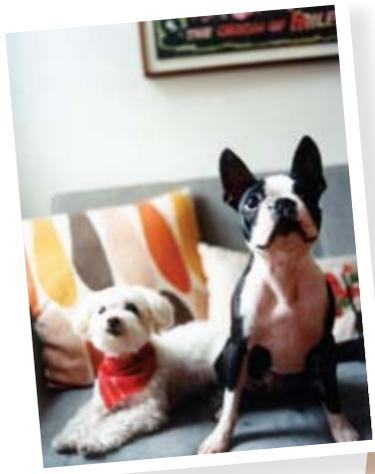
1/4 cup grated cheese of your choice (we used Parmesan)

Wash the Brussels sprouts well. Trim the stem ends and remove any raggy outer leaves. Cut in half from stem to top and gently rub each half with olive oil, keeping it intact. Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in your largest skillet over medium heat. Don't over-heat the skillet, or the outsides of the Brussels sprouts will cook too quickly. Place the Brussels sprouts in the pan flat side down

(single-layer), sprinkle with a couple of pinches of salt, cover, and cook for roughly 5 minutes; the bottoms of the sprouts should show only a hint of browning. Cut into or taste one of the sprouts to gauge whether they're tender throughout. If not, cover and cook for a few more minutes. Once just tender, uncover, turn up the heat, and cook until the flat sides are deep brown and caramelized. Use a metal spatula to toss them once or twice to get some browning on the rounded side. Season with more salt, a few grinds of pepper, and a dusting of grated cheese.

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Grow Your Own Herbs

Buy a mix of six rosemary, sage, oregano, or thyme plants in two- or four-inch pots. Choose a container 24 inches in diameter and 18 inches deep with a drainage hole at the bottom. Cover the hole with gravel or small rocks. Submerge plants, still in their pots, in a bucket of water until air bubbles cease. Fill your container with a blend of potting mix and sand, and water until thoroughly moist. Remove plants and rootballs from their pots and place each one in a scooped-out hole. Pat surface smooth, and water to fill in air pockets.

Keep the mix moist but not soggy during the first spring and summer of growth. Best to plant in early spring or summer and fertilize about three weeks after planting and again each spring. Harvest when plants show at least two inches of new growth. Three-quarters to a full day of direct sun is the best growing condition for your herbs.

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Eating Local Resources

- 100MileDiet.org
- LocalHarvest.org
- SlowFoodUSA.org
- EatWellGuide.com
- *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* By Barbara Kingsolver (HarperCollins)