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Holiday Fixings, Locally Grown



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THE word locavore may be new to the lexicon, but eating locally was a way of life long before the Pilgrims came ashore at Plymouth. For the feast that celebrated their first spotty harvest in a land of plenty, the beleaguered colonists looked to the big-hearted Mashpee Wampanoags to tutor them in hunting and gathering — lessons that probably saved their lives.

My own experience with locavores — I was raised by them — had more to do with my father’s hardscrabble upbringing than with food politics. We had a Jersey cow, Geraldine, and her creamy milk spoiled me for life. Our small pasture and modest garden in northern California produced lamb and beef, brown eggs and field mushrooms, zucchini and pumpkins, apples and lemons, pears and figs. Wild blackberries, miner’s lettuce and accidental plums stood in for snacks. My mother was known to put whole pomegranates in our lunch boxes.

Here in the Hudson Valley, the harvest presents all kinds of possibilities, but my [Thanksgiving](#) dinner remains a pretty strict culinary exercise: roast turkey; pear, sausage and chestnut stuffing; mashed potatoes; gravy laced with white wine; old-fashioned cranberry sauce; buttered haricots verts; and slices of pumpkin pie buried under whipped cream. The kids drink apple cider; the grown-ups drink a fine wine. (Molded chocolate turkeys are optional.)

I set out to find locally grown ingredients for my traditional menu without getting religious about it. (Spices, vanilla extract and coffee come from distant climes; I would at least look for “fair trade” products.) Aspiring locavores, take heart. Our region is a bountiful patchwork of forests, orchards, pastures, fields, ponds and streams. The cold waters of Long Island Sound are home to clams and oysters. New York vineyards produce wines that have greatly improved in recent years.

In honor of the Pilgrims, I decided it wouldn’t be sporting to include anything that couldn’t survive a good frost. Forget the California raspberries, the Hawaiian pineapples and the French green beans, as well as that Australian shiraz we liked last year. I also didn’t want to burn a lot of fossil fuel chasing after ingredients, so I would rely on nearby shops and markets.

Sellers and Sources:

HEMLOCK HILL FARM 500 Croton Avenue, Cortlandt Manor, (914) 737-2810. All-natural, free-range turkeys can be ordered by phone and picked up at the farm. (Hemlock Hill turkeys can also be ordered for delivery to your door through midnight, Nov. 20, at mypersonalfarmers.com.)

The bird came first. I honestly almost hit a wild turkey in the road last week, which would have meant considerable savings on the meal's centerpiece. (The season for hunting wild turkeys in New York closed on Nov. 14; radical locavores should make a note to secure a turkey permit for next fall.)

In seasons past, I have bought an organic Eberly turkey, raised in Pennsylvania, from my local grocery. The Eberly bird (also sold under the D'Artagnan label) was the top scorer in a 1996 New York Times turkey taste-off.

Locavores might be a little uneasy with both the distance from Pennsylvania and the scale of the operation, so I called the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, which raises pastured Red Bourbon and Broad Breasted White turkeys, only to find that they had sold out for this year. And in Kingston, Joshua Applestone, a fourth-generation butcher who owns Fleisher's Meats, was sorry to say that the 30 to 40 turkeys he consigned 4-H members to raise for him this year had all been spoken for. He promised that the program would be bigger and better next year, and that he'd be delivering to Westchester by then. (Mr. Applestone did have plenty of maple breakfast and sage sausage for my stuffing on hand.)

I had better luck when I called John De Maria, the owner of Hemlock Hill Farm, in Cortlandt Manor, who had plenty of free-range turkeys for sale. Asked if his birds were good tasting, he was matter-of-fact. "We've had customers buying our turkeys for 30 years or more," he said.

In Pleasant Valley, Quattro's Game Farm had three breeds of turkeys: red, white and wild. The birds there are fattened with corn and barley and dressed on site.

Cranberries, whose hue and taste are required footnotes to a turkey dinner, are grown where the Pilgrims found them, in the Cape Cod region. Locavores will want to avoid cranberries from Washington State and Michigan. Mrs. Green's Natural Markets, throughout Westchester, sell organic cranberries from Buzzards Bay, Mass.

For produce, I headed to the weekly Katonah-Lewisboro Farmers' Market, at John Jay High School in Cross River. There, at the Migliorelli Farm stand, I found Bosc pears, onions and celery for my stuffing, and two delicious ciders — apple and pear. (I couldn't resist the Mutsu apples, big as grapefruits, which I'll slice and serve with a Hudson Valley Camembert before dinner.) Newgate Farms had neat rows of pie pumpkins, heirloom Ozette fingerling potatoes for mashing and lovely White Satin carrots to flavor turkey stock. Local green beans had succumbed to frost, so I decided to go with love-'em-or-hate-'em brussels sprouts, still clinging like little green koalas to their thick stalk.

Also at the market, Bread Alone, from Boiceville, had beautiful loaves of brioche and peasant bread for my stuffing (they'll be selling bags of bread cubes for Thanksgiving). The bakery's pastries — Danishes, pains au chocolat — might be useful for placating any ornery holiday house guests.

I have high standards for butter and cream, thanks to Geraldine, so I was pleased to find excellent heavy cream from the Battenkill Valley Creamery at the New England Farms stand (where I also bought a dozen brown and white eggs in a pretty purple carton, and maple syrup for sweetening the pumpkin pie). A few miles south, at Near and Natural, in Bedford Village, I found delicious unsalted butter and wonderfully rich Jersey cream from Evans Farmhouse Creamery, in Chenango County. Plum Plums, in nearby Pound Ridge, stocks high quality butter and cream from Ronnybrook Farm Dairy, in Ancramdale.

I thought I'd be stumped when it came to flour for making pie pastry and thickening gravy, but Wild Hive Farm, in Clinton Corners, mills a beautiful soft-textured flour from locally grown organic wheat, available at Near and Natural. And at the historic Phillipsburg Manor, in Sleepy Hollow, local corn and wheat are ground on the premises between two water-powered buhrstones — in a fine show of green technology — and sold in cloth sacks (visitors must cross a footbridge to the mill to purchase cornmeal and flour).

I struck out on chestnuts. Michelle Morgan-Krall of the American Chestnut Foundation, in Bennington, Vt., said the nearest commercially grown nuts would come from Pennsylvania or Ohio, but I found that most orchards had suffered poor crops and sold out long ago. Wild American chestnuts have been all but wiped out by a blight, and efforts are afoot to restore the tree to Eastern hardwood forests. Until then, I'll have to lean on a neighbor who hoards hickory nuts.

Thomas Carter, the wine director at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, in Pocantico Hills, is a liquid locavore. He's a big fan of the bourbon and rye whiskeys from the Tuthilltown Spirits distillery, in Gardiner, and a champion of New York wines. For Thanksgiving, he likes the 2006 dry riesling from the Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard, a Finger Lakes producer. "It's got great minerality and acidity, lots of ripe fruit," he said. "It goes with rich, fall flavors — squash, bacon, dark meat. Also, rieslings are low in alcohol — they don't mask the overall experience of food."

When it was suggested that some people, particularly those thrown together with too many relatives, might welcome a little extra alcohol, Mr. Carter laughed and said, "That's what the Tuthilltown whiskey is for."