



Saturdays ARE FOR Snacks

A lunch
made
from finds
at the
Columbia
Farmers
Market.

BY MARY KATE
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SATURDAYS ARE GREAT SPRINTERS — THEY GET AWAY BEFORE THEY EVEN SEEM TO BEGIN.

I let Saturday run. As a believer that the idea of hyper-productivity is counterproductive, I take Saturday as a chance for my brain to breathe. One of the best ways I do this is through learning about food, whether it's by cooking, tasting, reading, or visiting the Columbia Farmers Market, a place that showcases our community's farmers and artisans and helps bolster our region's culture and environment.

Being an early riser, on Saturdays, I begin to set the state-of-mind for food by securing a cup of coffee and, of course, the mandatory baked goods. Saturday is the day a splash of half-and-half replaces my splash of soy milk. Why not, when I have the time for indigestion that follows?

If breakfast is the most important meal of the day, then lunch is the most neglected. During the week, my rushed, sad desk salads, and fast-casual bites wreck the potential optimism lunch tries to assert. Right when I'm feeling down in the middle of the day, lunch is there to provide an interlude and a delicious treat. There is no better place to give lunch the respect it deserves than at the Columbia Farmers Market.

Truthfully, I don't go to the farmers market every Saturday. For me, the market is a fun adventure that I visit with no plan and, embarrassingly, sometimes with no reusable bags!

Walking up to the market pavilion, one can hear music and neighborhood chatter pour out onto the street, allowing market visitors to get a taste of what Columbia has to offer before they even take their first bite of a savory Ozark Mountain Biscuit Co. biscuit.



I like to ask the farmers what their favorite ways are to prepare a particular vegetable. This, I have found, helps me fail less, and unlocks a treasure trove of farmers-only knowledge.

In addition to produce and meat, vendors also sell prepared foods, plants, honey, flowers, and baked goods — there's even a man that sharpens knives every weekend. There is a little bit of everything for everyone. These goods represent hours of labor and love performed by the individual smiling back at you behind their table.

OPEN FOR SUMMER

My last visit to the farmers market took place in mid-April, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as they opened for the summer season. My adventure to the market, to say the least, was Hollywood-level bizarre. Unlike my bags, I did not forget my face mask. No music was heard, and familiar faces and booths were missing.

Throughout the market, booths were spaced far apart, some shielded by plastic coverings. I navigated the market following crowd control and social distancing directions.

Despite the physical hurdles, I experienced the same cheerfulness I would have any other Saturday. I witnessed familiar unbridled passion from vendors while inquiring about different greens. I was even talked into purchasing, for the first time, dinosaur kale: a dark leafed, purple stemmed kale variety. Reminded of the resilience and strength of our community, I walked away with a terrific haul.



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THE HAUL

It was an impressive mixture. I picked up some extra-large ravioli and greens lasagna from Pasta La Fata, microgreen salad mix and rainbow chard microgreens from Stem to Table, and a jar of Hemme Brothers quark cheese — out of both self-love and self-loathing, I always purchase the smaller jar. I was coaxed into taking home the dinosaur kale (also called lacinato kale or black kale) and then I spotted some green onion and, for a friend, an egg and cheese biscuit from the Ozark Mountain Biscuit truck.

Other frequent farmers market purchases are fresh flowers and bread, any lavender product, and mini pies or sweet bread loaves. My shopping mantra is twofold: to not buy anything I don't think I will consume and to try something new.

Stem to Table microgreens are my market staple. Like most things, greens are cuter when tiny. One of my favorites is Stem to Table's basil microgreens, which, to me, are a modern take on basil: sweeter, brighter, and refreshing.

I throw my microgreens onto almost anything that could use a nutritional kick: sandwiches, salads, even crackers smeared with a cheese like Hemme Brothers' quark, a creamy, mild-tasting German cheese that becomes buddies with almost anything it touches.

Through some Google research, I found that microgreens are harvested when the plant is no taller than five centimeters. This is typically about one to three weeks into the plant's life. Microgreens are best eaten raw. When cooked, they can lose their vitality, as well as precious water-soluble vitamins and enzymes.

Stem to Table also sells edible flowers, honey, balms, and salad mixes. Stem to Table and Hemme Brothers are among the many farmers market vendors whose goods are also available in grocery stores around Columbia.

TIME FOR LUNCH

With the awareness that I had only consumed caffeine and sugar that morning, and with anchovy pasta sitting on my dinner plate docket, I knew lunch was my best chance to work in anything restorative for the day. My solution? Quick greens sautéed with pantry staples.

Snacking on cheese and crackers, I tore the kale by hand. As explained by its farmer, the dinosaur kale was intense. It had a firm bite and a taste that made me scrunch my nose. Even after sautéing in the usual suspects — garlic, red onion, salt, pepper, red pepper flakes, and extra virgin olive oil — the hefty green still had some attitude.

I tossed a handful of microgreens salad mix on top for a balance of warm and cold. Then I finished the plate with a crumble off the feta cheese block and lemon. Hot sauce and tortilla chips may have made an appearance too. It was fast. And the only thing I regret is not adding a fried egg. Almost everything is better with an egg on top, maybe even a chocolate cake. 🍰

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