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HARVEST HEADLINE: STONE FRUIT SUMMER!



It's shaping up to be a Stone Fruit Summer!

Stone fruit is arriving at farmers' markets, filling farmers' tables with the colors of summer. Bright oranges, deep purples, and golden yellows catch the eye, while the scent of ripe fruit drifts through the market. As shoppers weave between stalls, the season reveals itself in real time. Each week brings new varieties and fresh harvests, offering a reminder that summer is just around the corner.

Sweet apricots are already at markets, while cherries continue their short but beloved season. Recent rain has done more than water the fields. It's caused some cherries and early stone fruit to split when the fruit takes on water, and the inner flesh swells faster than the outer skin can stretch. Even so, there is still plenty available and much more produce on the way as summer deepens.

For Michael Arata of Arata Fruit, that means peaches, plums, and nectarines arriving at markets beginning the first week of June, with figs possibly following if they're ready. The timing also marks Arata Fruit's return to seasonal market schedules. Arata's family has been bringing nectarines to San Francisco from Byron since the 1940s. He says this year's harvest is arriving earlier than usual.

"Everything is moving earlier this year," Arata said. While he cannot single out a favorite among the early summer offerings, he emphasizes that "all the stone fruit is good if you pick it ripe."

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Each crop has its own window, and that window reflects how quickly the season changes. Each week, and sometimes each day, new varieties are picked. One market visit, the tables are covered in cherries, and on the next, those same tables are filled with peaches. Change isn't something you hear about; it's something you watch unfold in front of you.

That rhythm defines the summer, according to Alice Allard of Allard Farms. Allard, who runs the Westley-based organic farm alongside her husband, Guy, says figs will likely be the next fruit that shoppers get excited about, with their harvest set to arrive in the third week of June.

"Apricots are the big thing right now," Allard said, "but every day there's something being picked. So, figs will probably be the next big thing that everybody likes."

But as Allard points out, fruit seasons can be unpredictable.

"We're at the mercy of Mother Nature," she says. Speaking about impatient shoppers, she adds, "They don't understand why you don't have something or why it's only here for so long. A lot of things are really short seasons."

While grocery stores make it easy for people to expect the same fruits year-round, farmers' markets reflect what is actually in season locally at a given moment. At the farmers' market, that means the table displays are never permanent. Some fruits appear only a few weeks before something new arrives. That constant change is part of what makes farmers' markets special, and why the produce found there feels so immediate and tastes so fresh. The colors of the market shift week by week; apricots fading into peaches, rows of produce rearranging themselves with the season.

Beyond familiar favorites, farmers' markets are also one of the few places that shoppers can discover unique hybrid fruits that they may not find elsewhere.

"We have a Peacotum and a Nectaplum, and I think both of those are something that everybody should try," Allard said. "A Peacotum is a peach, plum, and apricot. And a Nectaplum is a mix of white nectarine and plum." Both specialty fruits are available at farmers' markets this season.

As for how to enjoy stone fruit at its peak, Allard recommends keeping it simple.

"Fresh off the tree," she said. "Apricots, if I'm going to do anything, I think apricot pie is the best."

Whether eaten out of hand on the walk home, shared with friends, or baked into something warm from the oven, stone fruit is at its best when it's just been picked, something only a farmers' market can offer. And with new varieties arriving each week, shoppers will have plenty of reasons to keep coming back to the farmers' market all summer long.

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