



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Pick-Your-Own Farms Offer Juicy Gems

Hartford, CT – Which is the freshest fruit of all? The one you pick yourself.

Pick-your-own (PYO) farms began opening around the state this month, providing residents the chance to harvest fruits and vegetables right off the plant, offering the sweetest, juiciest produce available anywhere.

Some customers hit the farm on the way home from work, picking just enough for dinner and perhaps the next morning's breakfast. Others head out with the family and make a day of it, harvesting by the bushel, then spending the afternoon sorting, trimming, and freezing or canning so that there will be plenty for months to come.

"This is a terrific family activity," said CT Commissioner of Agriculture F. Philip Prelli. "Not only does it provide delicious, healthy food, it also is a great way for parents and children to get fresh air, exercise, and learn more about where food comes from and how it grows."

Those heading for the field this weekend can still find late-season strawberries, as well as the first raspberries and sweet cherries of the summer. Blueberries will be ready to pick starting next weekend, adding to the sumptuous selection for holiday picnics and desserts. Some PYO farms also offer vegetables, such as peas at this time of year.

The types of plants grown on PYO farms have been selected for characteristics best suited for easy harvest. Plump blueberries that grow in large clusters, for example, make for quicker picking than their tiny-fruited cousins, the wild blueberries. Cherry trees are grafted onto dwarf rootstocks so that an average person can easily reach their bounty from the ground.

According to farmers, this is shaping up to be an excellent PYO season.

“The cherry trees are loaded with juicy, high-quality fruit,” said Don Preli, whose family has operated Belltown Hill Orchards in South Glastonbury for nearly a century. The Preli family grows both sweet cherries, best suited for out-of-hand eating, as well as tart cherries, preferred for baking and cooking, among the many crops offered at their farm.

Just down the road at Rose’s Berry Farm, Henry and Sandi Rose agree that customers have been enjoying some of the best fruit in recent years.

“The blueberries are incredible,” said Mr. Rose. “Consumers are in for a real treat this season.”

Over 80 PYO locations are listed in the CT Department of Agriculture’s new brochure, “Pick Your Own Fruits & Vegetables,” available at town halls, libraries, and other locations throughout the state. The brochure also is available [electronically](#) on the Department’s website, www.CTGrown.gov (click on “[Publications](#)” at the top of the page).

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