August 2013

August means we’re nearing the end of the summer, which also means that tons of Michigan produce is for sale at your local farmers market. Don’t be afraid to stock up! This issue will provide you with great resources to help you better use all of that produce. Of course we haven’t forgotten that August means the start of a new school year. This issue will give you some helpful ideas for preparing healthy lunches and snacks for every member of your family.

Believe it or not, the beginning of a new school year is right around the corner. While you’re busy picking up new notebooks and backpacks, don’t forget about another essential part of a successful school year—healthy lunches and snacks! In this issue, you’ll get tips for saving money and time, while still sending your kids off to class with healthy lunches they’ll want to eat!

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Top Ten Tips for Quick Lunch Prep

Making healthy and tasty lunches doesn’t have to be a burden

Start the school year off right by getting into the habit of sending your kids to school with healthy lunches and having easy-to-grab snacks ready for after school. Here are some ideas to minimize kitchen time and maximize family fun time:

1. **Weekend warriors** – Make lunches and after-school snacks on Saturday or Sunday, when the family has an hour or two to finish the task.

2. **Involve your kids** – Save time by giving simple tasks to your kids. The little ones will take ownership in their meal and can be proud of what they've helped create.

3. **Even it out** – Distribute tasks to each family member, keeping in mind the level of their ability and their preferences. Assign younger kids to counting out lunch bags and getting items out of the fridge. Assign older kids to washing fruits and veggies or assembling sandwiches.

4. **Have fun** – Take turns picking music to make the family time in the kitchen more enjoyable.

5. **Dust off that crock pot** – Prepare a meal in the crock pot before you go to bed at night and pour your healthy stew into thermoses the next morning.

6. **Leftovers?** – Use/repurpose dinner leftovers whenever possible.

7. **Label** – Remember to label everyone’s lunches to avoid lunchtime letdown.

8. **Food Safety** – Freeze a juice box or sugar-free drink as a handy ice pack. Alternatively, soak a sponge in water, place it in a small Ziploc bag, and freeze for an inexpensive and reusable ice pack.

9. **It’s for you too** – Don’t forget that this meal-making mania is for your work lunches too. Bringing your lunch to work means you’ll save money, eat more healthfully, and set a great example for your kids. Yours may be the same as the kids’ lunches or you can cater them to your more sophisticated taste buds—just make sure to use this time to prepare your lunches as well.

10. **Don’t forget the snacks!** – Prepare snacks containing a protein component as well as a grain or fruit and vegetable to keep kids satisfied until dinner. Store snacks in a designated area in the fridge so kids can grab them before play or homework.
School Lunches – The Old Fall Back

If school lunches are a more economical choice for your family, you can rest assured that they will be offered a complete meal at school. While there is an emphasis on healthy school lunches, it’s still possible for students to make plenty of unhealthy choices. Talk with your kids before school starts and decide on some school lunch guidelines:

How often will they buy school lunch? If it’s everyday, suggest they stick to the healthiest choices Monday through Thursday, and then have pizza on Friday.

What’s on the menu? Many school lunch menus are now posted online monthly. Review the menu for the week and talk to your kids about the best choices based on their preferences.

Follow Up
On the days they buy, ask your kids what foods they chose and why. Pretend they are food critics and follow up by asking them how their food tasted. What was good? What was not so good? What would they have changed about the item or the menu? Reviewing their choices will help them reflect and make them think about their choices the next time they’re in the lunch line.

Need more information on free or reduced lunches and breakfast?
Your children’s school will provide an application during the first week of class.
Bento Boxes—Better than a Brown Paper Bag

Keep your kids interested in their meals by changing up last year’s routine

It’s easy to fall into the brown paper bag routine, with the same lunches everyday for everyone in the family. Keep your kids (and yourself) interested in lunches by changing it up with new items each week. Consider basing each week’s lunches on the deals you find at the farmers market or grocery store. Bento boxes are gaining popularity and help avoid those mushy peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and bruised bananas that you get with a brown paper bag, but can be expensive to buy along with their marketed accessories. Here are some ideas for making some simple bento boxes at home with what you already have on hand:

DIY Bento Box

⇒ Use Tupperware containers you have on hand as the bento box base.

⇒ Keep foods separate and in place with inexpensive waxed muffin cup liners.

⇒ “Filler” foods also keep foods separate (we know kids hate when foods get mixed together... GROSS!). Healthy, low calorie foods like grapes, baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, and celery sticks are great options.

⇒ Have fun! Don’t be intimidated by the fancy bento boxes you see online, but don’t be afraid to try something new. Mix it up and use whatever good deals you found at the grocery store to fill in your DIY bento boxes. Remember to include a whole grain, some lean protein, vegetables, fruit, and dairy to make a complete meal. See the next page for some ideas to get you started on your DIY bento boxes.
DIY Bento Box Recipe—Sandwich Roll Ups

Serves 4

Ingredients
4 – 8 tbsp low-fat cream cheese
4 8-inch whole-wheat tortillas
4 to 8 ounces thinly sliced lean meat

Directions

⇒ Spread the cream cheese evenly over one side of each tortilla, all the way to the edge.

⇒ Arrange the meat (and any vegetables you want to add) in an even layer over the tortilla, leaving about 1 inch of cream cheese exposed along the edges.

⇒ Roll the tortilla and fillings into a tight bundle. If the tortilla will not stay intact, spread a little more cream cheese along the edge to help keep it together.

⇒ Use a serrated knife to cut the roll into 1-inch rounds.

Consider adding vegetables (like grated carrot, broccoli slaw, or leafy greens) to make the roll ups more filling. Substitute the cheese with peanut butter and the meat with bananas to enjoy a sweeter roll up for breakfast.

Adapted from http://www.heraldsun.com/lifestyles/food/x533456607/Easy-school-lunches-1-minute-gazpacho-and-versatile-take-on-sushi

DIY Bento Box Complete Lunch Ideas

The American Brown Paper Bag Turned Bento
Egg salad sandwich roll up with cherry tomatoes, cheese, celery, carrots, and grapes.

The Mediterranean Bento
Whole wheat pita bread, cherry tomatoes, bell pepper slices, tabbouleh, hummus, olives, and stuffed grape leaves. Add some apple slices to make it a complete meal.

The Mexican Leftover Bento
Cheese quesadillas with Mexican rice, salsa, guacamole, bell pepper slices, and a few tortilla chips. Add some strawberries or blueberries to make it a complete meal. Note lettuce is used to separate the rice.

Adapted from Short Order Mom Anne Coleman’s page on http://family.go.com/
**What’s Fresh at the Farmers Market?**

*Check out your local farmers market for the freshest, most nutritious, and least expensive fruits and vegetables available this month.*

**In August, shop for** green beans, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chard, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, greens, kale, lettuce, peppers, potatoes, radishes, summer squash (zucchini and yellow summer squash), sweet potatoes, and tomatoes. The fruits to look for are blackberries, blueberries, and melons.

**Looking forward, September** will bring in the season for arugula, parsnips, turnips, apples, pears and watermelon.

For more information and to check out what is fresh in any month, go to [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/uploads/235/21691/AvailabilityPoster_print.pdf](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/uploads/235/21691/AvailabilityPoster_print.pdf)

**Budget Bonus!**

Use SNAP Double Up Food Bucks to stretch your dollar at the farmers market. Every SNAP dollar you spend is matched by this helpful program. Double Up Food Bucks truly doubles your money at the farmers market! Take advantage of the program before it ends for the season on October 31. For more information on Double Up Food Bucks, go to [http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org/](http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org/). For more information on SNAP, contact Food Gatherers at SNAP@foodgatherers.org or call (734) 761-2796.
What’s New at Food Gatherers?

Introducing Food Gatherers’ newest hires: Carl Gilford II, Jimmy Batchelor, Jeff Grigg, and Brad Parks

These friendly gentlemen are the newest Food Runners here at Food Gatherers.

Welcome them to the Food Gatherers’ community the next time you see them.

What to do with all this...

It may be a ton of tomatoes from your neighbor, zillions of zucchinis from a food distribution, or an avalanche of apples from the farmers market – it’s fun to get all of that produce, but what do you do with all of that abundance? A great resource to help you fully utilize your produce bounty, Michigan Fresh’s website provides free fact sheets that include information on storage, food safety, and preservation for various fruits and veggies. Go to http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/mi_fresh for the fact sheets.

Another handy online tool, the Greater Pittsburg Community Food Bank’s “Recipe Rainbow” database generates suggestions for recipes based on the food you have on hand. Simply select the grocery items you have on hand (for example, tuna, pasta, and broccoli). You will see results for several recipes, one of which may contain all of the ingredients that you entered. Go to http://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/recipedatabase/ to try it for yourself.

Agency Spotlight

Food Gatherers has been visiting Hikone’s Summer Camp every Tuesday to talk about nutrition with campers. The campers love the nutrition themed physical activities and healthy snacks! Graham crackers, low-fat vanilla yogurt and grapes were a hit!