

Explore on your own the world of edible domesticated plants in a self-guided field trip to the Farmers' Market at College of San Mateo: Wednesdays in lot 16 at the extreme west end of the campus and Saturdays in lot 1 just south of Building 4.

1. Survey of Plant Parts

We eat a variety of plant foods. Few plants are eaten in their entirety (name one). For most we eat only their seeds (almond, sunflower, sesame, poppy, coconut, etc.); fruits (squash, bell pepper, snow pea, banana, vanilla orchid, etc.); floral parts (saffron, clove, etc.); other shoots (brussel sprouts, celery, etc.); tubers (potato, jicama, etc.); roots (parsnips, oca, licorice, etc.); or leaves (basil, lettuce, sage, collard greens, etc.).

Take a notepad plus a sketch book or a camera to the Farmers' Market.

Survey the current crop of mostly local fresh or dried produce. Enjoy the baked goods, kettle corn, or other prepared foods if you like, but they are not our focus. We are looking for single-ingredient items that were once part of a living plant. Few, if any, of the plants for sale here were flown in from another hemisphere experiencing a very different climate from ours, although some may have been "forced" in an artificially warmed and lighted enclosure; so you might see some items that won't grow this time of year in your back garden.

Construct a table to categorize the fresh produce you see. In addition to the name of food item, you could include "plant part eaten," (seed, fruit, stem, shoot, flower, etc.); "how eaten" (fresh, baked, steamed, fried, boiled, etc.); "flavor sensation" (sweet, savory, sour, bitter, tangy, picante, bland, etc.); "textural component" (juicy, crunchy, chewy, dry, slippery, slimey, etc.); and your experience/inexperience.

2. Adventure in Eating

Acquire at least one piece of a plant food item you have never eaten before. You might be lucky and be offered a free taste of one. You might have to buy one. If it is not ordinarily eaten raw, find out how to prepare it. Most of the people who bring their products here would love to convert you into someone who enjoys the foods they grow/sell so it shouldn't be difficult to get some advice about how to prepare them.

Describe your experiment and experience with the new food item. You should probably have only a small amount the first time, just in case it turns out to be the one thing in the world to which you were allergic and didn't know it. Imagine what it would be like moving through a strange natural environment not knowing what was good to eat, what was awful and what was lethal. You would probably begin by putting a small amount in your mouth and just holding it there before chewing and eventually swallowing. (Hint: if it makes your tongue numb or your head buzz, spit it out.)