

What's in the BOX



Get more local foods with our interactive directory of farmers markets at atlantamagazine.com/farmersmarkets

TRULY LIVING WELL

How it works: This nonprofit operates urban gardens and teaches city dwellers about the importance of agriculture. A full CSA share costs \$400—or \$250 for a half order—for thirteen weeks. (TLW also offers a \$195 half share for subscribers sixty-two and over.)

What we liked: A subscription is good for thirteen visits at either TLW's Wheat Street location (open Friday afternoons) or its East Point location (open Wednesday afternoons). You select produce from a displayed array, a rarity in the CSA universe. Have to skip a week? No problem; just use up your thirteen visits within six months. Favorite items included stubby but crisp Poona Kheera cucumbers, pattypan squash, red onions, leeks, and collards.

What we didn't: Get there as close to opening time as you can, or risk having the selection picked over. trulylivingwell.com —STEVE FENNESSY

RIVERVIEW FARMS

How it works: Riverview Farms is a 200-acre organic farm in northwest Georgia. Each Wednesday it distributes boxes full of produce at drop-offs in Norcross, Decatur, Tucker, Acworth, and throughout Atlanta. The price is \$270 for ten-week subscriptions, which are offered at three different periods from May to December. A meat CSA, available year-round, runs six months and costs either \$410 or \$770, depending on the size. Riverview claims that it gives enough vegetables for a family of four for a week. That claim might be *slightly* generous.

What we liked: Our produce subscription was in the heat of summer, and each week featured about six to eight different items. Among them: blueberries, turnips, squash, garlic, kale, corn, onions, cilantro, parsley, melons, tomatoes, pole beans, lettuces, and red potatoes.

What we didn't: The boxes are prepacked, so you take what you're given. grassfedcow.com —S.F.

SERENBE

How it works: This CSA is part of a planned village devoted to environmental sustainability. Dine at one of Serenbe's three restaurants or visit the fields during free monthly tours, starting in June. Full CSA shares pick up every Tuesday, and half shares (each portion contains the same quantity as a full share) pick up every other Tuesday, at either Serenbe Farms near Palmetto or at the offices of Strongbox West off Howell Mill Road. Flexible options include April to November (\$800 for full/\$450 for half), April to September (\$600/\$350), and September to November (\$300/\$175). The Westside location is not staffed; choose a plastic container and empty the produce into your own bag.

What we liked: Produce was always pristine and fresh. The preselected variety forces you to try novelties like pink Hawaiian ginger, celeriac, and chard. But there are plenty of favorites like tomatoes, melons, and squash. If you don't know how to cook something like daikon, check your e-newsletter for a timely recipe.

What we didn't: No choice. Bummer if you hate eggplant or collard greens. serenbefarms.com —BETSY RILEY

LOVE IS LOVE FARM AT GAIA GARDENS

How it works: Farmers and local food activists Joe Reynolds and Judith Winfrey work the land at Gaia Gardens in Decatur's East Lake neighborhood. No half shares; full shares are \$410 for sixteen weeks, with spring/summer and summer/fall sessions. Pickups are on Wednesdays at the farm or on Sundays at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta. Go to the farm to say hello to Reynolds; he's the one with the bushy red beard and beaming smile.

What we liked: Love Is Love also sells to restaurants, and it's easy to see why chefs clamor for the produce. During a spring/summer share, buttery Yukon Gold potatoes, fragrant basil, sweet peppers, small okra pods, early tomatoes, and a bonus supplement of fresh goat cheese from local Decimal Place Farm all stood out.

What we didn't: The only drawback? Love Is Love is crazy popular, with a waitlist through 2013. Contact the farm now to get on next year's list. loveislovefarm.com —BILL ADDISON

MOORE FARMS AND FRIENDS

How it works: Laurie and Will Moore—who operate out of Woodland, Alabama, but pool with Georgia farmers—took a unique approach. Members pay a \$30 annual fee and can then order online weekly, with no commitment. Choose a \$20, \$30, or \$40 “farmer's pick” box or pay a \$5 surcharge to select your own (mostly organic) vegetables—say, \$4 for broccoli and \$3 for a bunch of carrots. The minimum weekly order is \$20, though they also offer eggs, dairy, meats, prepared foods like salsa and granola, and even dog biscuits.

What we liked: The flexible ordering holds obvious appeal. We tried the \$30 box option in the winter, particularly enjoying kale, root vegetables, and organic citrus from Florida. Fresh eggs possessed rich, golden yolks. And with at least twenty metro pickup locations on Wednesdays and Thursdays, the service is mighty convenient.

What we didn't: A too-sweet bag of butter pecan granola was the only disappointment. moorefarmsandfriends.com —B.A.

Thinking Outside the Box

Getting the most from your CSA requires sound planning. A few pointers:

► Choose a CSA with a pickup point near your home or workplace. On a busy day, you'll be less likely to abandon your share if it's on your way.

► Two vegetable-loving adults or a family of four should have no problem consuming a full weekly CSA share, which typically includes a few servings each of six to twelve different foods. But if you have doubts, sign up for a half share. Better yet, split a full with a neighbor or coworker. You can share pickup duties, and if one of you loves broccoli and the other favors radishes, you can negotiate a trade.

► Strategize before you even receive your share. Most farms send out emails advising members on the CSA's weekly loot. Search for recipes in advance (particularly for unfamiliar vegetables) and plan to use the most perishable items on the day you receive them.

► For foods that need to go into the fridge, prep when possible. Wash and dry lettuce for a fast salad. Roast beets before storage; later, simply skin and slice them. Wash, dry, and chop greens so they're ready for the saute pan.

► Set aside time for items you need or want to preserve: Combine compatible ingredients in a soup, and freeze leftovers. Can tomatoes or pickle root vegetables. Make kale chips (the Internet is rife with recipes) for a long-lasting snack. Steep herbs in simple syrup to jazz up cocktails. —D.G.