

Healthy Harvest: Florida's Fruit and Vegetable Crops from the Farm to Your Plate¹

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Agriculture and the food industry is one of the largest economic sectors in the state of Florida, with direct industry sales revenue of more than \$182 billion, total output contributions of \$316 billion in sales, and more than 2,500,000 jobs (Court et al., 2023). Florida leads the United States in production of many crops including snap beans, cucumbers, and watermelon, and is second in the U.S. in production of squash, bell peppers, and tomatoes (USDA NASS, 2023). According to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, in 2023, Florida ranked first in the U.S. in the value of production for Valencia oranges, sugarcane, watermelons, and sweet corn; the state ranked second in value of production for bell peppers, all oranges, strawberries, tomatoes grown in the open, and non-Valencia oranges. Florida ranked third nationally in cabbage and grapefruit, and fourth nationally in peanuts (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2023). This agricultural bounty not only supports Florida's economy, but it also protects Florida's agricultural and natural lands, fosters community resilience, and supports the health and nutrition of Florida residents (Court, 2025).

Fruit and vegetable crops grow year-round in Florida, but the bulk of the crops are grown from fall through spring. Mid- to late spring is the time of year when harvesting is most intensive throughout the state (Agehara et al., 2024). Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables has numerous health benefits, including possible weight maintenance or reduction and reduced risk for certain non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and cancers (Wallace et al., 2020). Moreover, mounting evidence suggests that eating a diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables is linked to greater well-being and happiness (Mujcic & Oswald, 2016). Fruits, vegetables, and other plant-based foods contain phytochemicals — naturally occurring chemical compounds that support health by acting in part as antioxidants. Phytochemicals include compounds such as flavonoids and phenolic acids that can be found in a variety of produce, including color-rich citrus, berries, and cruciferous vegetables (Minich, 2019). While the health and nutrition benefits of eating a diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables are well-known, people continue to eat fewer than the number of

recommended servings for these foods (Minich, 2019). The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that people consume at least 2.5 servings of vibrant-colored vegetables and 2 servings of fruits with a variety of colors daily. However, fewer than 20% and 10% of adults meet the serving recommendations for vegetables and fruits, respectively (U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). In Florida, fewer than 15% of residents consume the daily recommended servings of fruit and vegetables (Florida Department of Health, 2023). With year-round availability of fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, and herbs from Florida farms, there are many delicious options you can include in your diet to keep you healthy and support Florida's farmers.

This *Healthy Harvest* series of publications is for Florida residents who are interested in knowing more about crops that grow well in the state of Florida. Readers will gain knowledge on ways these Florida crops are grown, times when the crops are available to be purchased from Florida growers, taste profiles, nutrition characteristics, ways to store and prepare them, reduction of produce waste, and facts about the crops.

Publications in This Series

1. Healthy Harvest: Florida's Fruit and Vegetable Crops from the Farm to Your Plate
2. Healthy Harvest: Florida Brassicas, Cruciferous Vegetables, and Leafy Greens — This group of vegetables includes broccoli, kale, cabbage, and a number of leafy greens.
3. Healthy Harvest: Florida Tubers and Root Vegetables — These crops, such as potatoes, radishes, and carrots, have edible roots that grow underground.
4. Healthy Harvest: Florida Legumes — Legumes are high-protein crops that include a number of different types of peas and beans.
5. Healthy Harvest: Florida's Warm-Season Vegetables — Solanaceous crops include many crops such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant that are popular in the summer and enjoyed fresh from the farmers market or the home garden.

6. Healthy Harvest: Florida Cucurbits — These are crops in the gourd family, including squash, cucumbers, and pumpkins, as well as melons.
7. Healthy Harvest: Florida Fruit and Nut Crops — These are fruits that grow on trees and vines, berries, and nuts.
8. Healthy Harvest: Florida Herbs — These are plants that are grown for their foliage or flowers, which are meant to add flavor to dishes (e.g., basil and cilantro).

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