

# EATING & DRINKING

**TASTE DRIVE**

## Outstanding in the Field

Produce boxes have proliferated in recent years. These top options bring the farm to you.



**BOUNTY CALL** The Chef's Garden is actually a 350-acre farm, where Lee Jones grows high-end produce hard to find elsewhere.

By GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

**R**EMEMBER what shopping for produce used to be like, complete with comforting rituals like sniffing tomatoes, knocking on melons and squeezing avocados? With the CDC recommending we choose home delivery over visiting the supermarket in the face of the coronavirus, our habits have changed overnight.

A Nielsen survey of consumer habits during the pandemic shows that sales of canned and frozen fruits and vegetables have outpaced sales of fresh produce at grocery stores—maybe because the fresh stuff needs to be replenished with more frequency. And frequent shopping trips are what we're trying to avoid.

Fortunately for consumers, the choices for online produce-box deliveries have gotten more robust in recent years, with strong options for varying budgets and household needs. Nationally, subscription boxes ship a mix of fruits and vegetables, allowing you to tailor the size of the box, its contents and frequency. Regionally, online market-

places connect producers and consumers. Some farmers operate without middlemen, shipping direct from the field to you.

Because demand is high and shipping logistics are complicated right now, online ordering can require some patience. Some subscriptions might have a wait list of one or two weeks to join, and some mom-and-pop operations have limited shipping to one day a week to consolidate labor. The vendors we liked best were transparent about all of this.

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As farmers pivot, it's also worth checking to see if local produce is being delivered in your area. Inquire with your farmer's market: Green City Market in Chicago, for instance, has teamed up with the app WhatsGood to deliver produce, and Lancaster Farm Fresh Coop in Pennsylvania has started its own home-delivery service. It's all unfolding in real time, so keep an ear out for fresh options.



**FARM TO TABLE**  
**Wildkale**

This online farmers' marketplace connects farmers directly to consumers. There is no warehouse or distribution center—the order is received and packed by the farmers themselves, and shipped to your doorstep overnight for a \$5.99 fee. The company currently works with a dozen farms in the northeast that deliver within 300 miles of their respective locations, covering parts of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and farther into New England. The platform is easy to use, and the prices seem almost too good to be true. Enter your ZIP Code and choose from a list of farms specializing in produce, grain, dairy and meat. Shoppers must spend a minimum of \$30 with a farm, but it ends up being a good value. My order of beets, two heads of cauliflower, green cabbage, two types of squash, kale, parsley and spinach totaled just over \$30, and the quality was pristine. Founder Ana Jakimovska said she is in talks with other farms to expand Wildkale's coverage nationally this summer. [wildkale.com](http://wildkale.com)



**NO FRILLS**  
**Misfits Market**

The first thing I thought when I opened the box of organic produce sent by this New Jersey-based food-salvage delivery service was...there's nothing wrong with it. Misfits Market rescues food prevented from reaching consumers by various issues—distribution snafus, off-spec size or shape—which would otherwise result in waste. Worthy mission aside, Misfits also happens to be an accessible source of quality organic produce. Choose from two subscription box sizes—\$22 for 10-13 pounds, \$35 for 18-22 pounds—with the option to select add-on items, such as Bob's Red Mill grains and Taza chocolate, at an extra cost. Contents of boxes vary depending on what the company procures that week. It's blissfully uncomplicated. My first shipment was a bonanza of 11 types of fruits and vegetables, including perky butter lettuce, sweet bell peppers and Champagne mangoes. Misfits delivers to 23 states plus Washington, D.C., and is expanding at a steady clip. [misfitsmarket.com](http://misfitsmarket.com)



**THE BRIGHT BOX**  
**Friend's Ranches**

Though the lineage of this 70-acre citrus farm in Ojai, Calif., goes back to the late 19th century, fifth-generation co-owner Emily Ayala's memories reach only as far as the 1970s, when her mother would tap out shipping labels for outgoing boxes of citrus on a typewriter. Friend's Ranches grows 50 varieties of citrus and a few types of avocado, with a focus on the late-season tangerine, a regional delicacy. Because of the coronavirus outbreak, the food service accounts that are an important source of income for the ranch this time of year have evaporated, but delivery is booming. What's available at the online store depends on what's been harvested that week. Single varieties, like blood oranges or low-acid Ojai Pixies can be purchased by the box (in season). The May Special is a 10-pound grab bag including the rich, shiny-skinned W. Murrcott and sweet Pixies, plus some fragrant Eureka lemons, for \$55. Shipments, available nationally, go out on Mondays and are available through May, until June 5. [friendsranches.com](http://friendsranches.com)



**PRO-LEVEL VEGETABLES**  
**The Chef's Garden**

Farmer Lee Jones is a sort of agricultural Willy Wonka, growing the most rarefied produce for the country's top restaurants. Normally, the 350-acre Ohio farm he co-owns with his family caters to chefs such as Thomas Keller and Daniel Boulud. "It's like overnight our entire customer base for 37 years vanished," said Mr. Jones. He started selling boxes of produce previously destined for Michelin-starred kitchens direct to home cooks. For the vegetable lover, it's a treat. The \$59 Introduction Box includes approximately a pound of seasonal lettuces; a root-vegetable mix, such as multicolored thumbelina carrots and baby turnips; about a pound of field greens; roughly a pound of potatoes; and a packet of microgreens. Bundles with themes such as Best of the Season and Immunity Booster are also available, with prices as high as \$175 for a box that feeds 4-6. Produce varies with the season, and shipping is included. [chefs-garden.com](http://chefs-garden.com)

**COOK'S PLAYBOOK**

## The Steak Frites Secret

Why it's so good in France. Beaucoup butter, for one

**AS MANY TIMES** as I've cooked steak, I've only rarely achieved that state of perfection found in Paris bistros. So, on a trip to that city researching recipes for an upcoming book, I was eager to consult with Hugo Desnoyer, the eponymous proprietor of what is arguably Paris's most highly regarded butcher shop.

"In France we have a method to make a perfect steak every time. It's very simple," he assured me. "As long as you use quality meat to begin with."

*Bifteck pôlée au beurre*—steak pan-seared in butter, the type that usually graces a plate of steak frites—originated in restaurant kitchens but is just as easily (and in France, just as often) made by home cooks. It involves a few straightforward steps: An iron skillet heats until wisps of smoke appear. A thick steak sears until it develops a toothsome crust. After a brief sojourn in the oven, it returns to the stovetop to be finished with melted, herb-flavored butter.

"This allows the full flavor to shine. Otherwise you are not doing justice to the meat," said Mr. Desnoyer.

Unlike many staple French techniques, this one isn't dependent on precision—though its steps are

rooted in culinary science. The high-heat searing encourages the Maillard reaction, by which a food's amino acids and sugars caramelize to create a savory golden crust. The sizzling butter spooned over the steak undergoes the same reaction, further heightening the flavor as well as lending richness.

Could it really be as easy as Mr. Desnoyer made it sound? There was only one way to find out. The first step was choosing a cut; I decided on a grass-fed filet mignon. I made sure I had on hand a European-style butter, with a higher butterfat content that prevents it from browning as fast as typical American-style butters do. I readied my mise-en-place, including tongs, for as Mr. Desnoyer had explained, piercing the meat with a fork allows valuable juice to escape.

I heated the skillet a full five minutes as directed, recalling the master butcher's parting words: "It's not complicated. Just one thing is essential: You must resist the temptation to turn the steak until it has cooked for two full minutes. It will be worth the wait, I promise you."

And reader, it was—juicy, precisely medium-rare, full of primal savor and as deliciously French as any I'd ever eaten. —James Oseland

**HOW TO SEAR A BISTRO-QUALITY STEAK / A CLASSIC FRENCH TECHNIQUE**



**1.** Begin with 1 (8- to 10-ounce) filet mignon, 1½-2 inches thick, and 2 tablespoons butter (preferably high-fat European-style). Let these come to room temperature at least 1 hour before cooking. Just before you're ready to cook, heat oven to 450 degrees.



**2.** Coat steak all over with 1 teaspoon flaky salt and a generous quantity of coarsely ground black pepper. Set a 12-inch ovenproof skillet over high heat until it gently smokes, about 5 minutes. Coat pan with 1 tablespoon neutral oil such as canola.



**3.** Set steak in skillet and leave it alone 2½ minutes. Gently try to lift steak. If it clings to pan, cook 30 seconds-1 minute more. Once steak releases fully, cooked side should be a deep golden, almost brown. Flip steak and cook, undisturbed, 2 minutes.



**4.** Transfer skillet to center rack in oven. For rare meat, cook 4 minutes. For medium-rare, cook until juices bead on surface, 6 minutes. Bear in mind, steak will continue to cook on the stovetop, so here you want to stop slightly short of done to your liking.



**5.** Return skillet to stove. Off heat, add butter, 1 sprig rosemary, 1 sprig thyme and 1 clove garlic, bruised with the flat of a knife. Tip pan toward you and spoon hot butter over steak, lifting occasionally so butter coats bottom of meat, about 1½ minutes.



**6.** Transfer steak to a plate along with pan juices. Cover plate with foil, and let steak rest 10 minutes before eating, to allow time for juices to redistribute through meat. Serve immediately with french fries and a glass of red wine.