



February 18, 2012

Originally published in  
the *Contra Costa Times*

#### SUMMARY

CSAs provide the opportunity for individuals to connect with farmers and get very involved with the growing of food, even for those people who have challenges that prevent them from actually digging in the dirt.

## Community Supported Agriculture

By Arti Kirch, UC Master Gardener

### Grow your own food... even if you can't.

*Q. What options are there for people like me who can't grow their own produce, but would like to eat fresh and organic food?*

A. There are many reasons why people cannot grow their own food. Perhaps time or garden space simply aren't available; illness or disability may present physical barriers to tending a garden; acquiring gardening knowledge may be either daunting, or simply uninteresting (hard for gardeners to imagine, but there you have it).

Now, the Bay Area does not lack for specialty stores and farmer's markets that abound with delicious offerings. However, there is another option that is quietly but robustly growing around the country and our area. That option is called Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA.

#### What is Community Supported Agriculture?

CSAs started to form in the 1960s in Europe in reaction to the loss of farm land and concerns about food safety. In its simplest terms, a CSA is a group of

individuals who subscribe to buy whatever is seasonally available from a farm or group of farmers. Generally, the food is delivered in boxes weekly to the subscribers. Every CSA is unique – some may limit their offerings to fruit and vegetable crops, while others may include meat or eggs. Because the weekly contents vary, subscribers find themselves trying new items or recipes – usually with delight – that they may not have otherwise.

#### What are the benefits of CSA's?

This arrangement helps everyone be involved in the growing of their own food by sharing both benefits and risks with the local farmer.

Farmers get a reliable income stream, and can spend time marketing their goods during the time of the year when they are not as busy.

For subscribers, CSAs provide an alternative source for super fresh food, or even varieties that are so unusual or fragile, that they never make it to more conventional outlets. Farm visits are



*“... illness or disability  
may present physical  
barriers to tending a  
garden; acquiring  
gardening knowledge  
may be either  
daunting, or simply  
uninteresting...”*

also usually a perk offered to CSA members.

Subscribers also get to feel some of what a farmer feels: when a crop doesn't do well, the weekly delivery may contain fewer or lower quality items. Although that may not seem like a good thing, subscribers report gaining a deep appreciation of the skill and wisdom required to produce food.

If you are feeling adventurous, you can even form your own CSA. Whatever you decide, CSAs provide the opportunity to get very close to growing your own food for those people who have challenges that prevent them from actually digging in the dirt.

**Resources:**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a concise list of credible sites that contain directories of CSAs, as well as small farms, farmers markets, and other local food sources:

<https://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/community-supported-agriculture>.

I