

TASHA “SNAPBACK” JOHNSON

FAMILY	TASHA'S PANTRY LIST	REAL FOOD
	QUICK	
★		
	HEALTHY	
REAL POWER		

“HEY, I GET IT — LIFE’S BUSY! BUT TRUST ME,
WITH THE RIGHT PANTRY PICKS, YOU CAN
SERVE UP MEALS THAT ARE FAST, FRESH AND
FAMILY-APPROVED.” - TASHA

Seasonal Produce Staples

Spring

As winter thaws, Maryland farmers' markets come alive with tender leafy greens. Stock up on spinach, kale, and Swiss chard, which peak in nutrition and flavor during early spring through fall. These versatile greens work in smoothies, salads, and sautés for quick family meals.

- Asparagus and peas (April-May)
- Radishes and spring onions
- Early lettuce varieties

Summer

Summer brings an explosion of color and flavor to Maryland markets. This is prime time for berries, stone fruits, tomatoes, and sweet corn 3 all kid favorites that can be enjoyed fresh or preserved for later.

- Blueberries, blackberries, strawberries (June-August)
- Sweet corn, tomatoes, cucumbers (July-September)
- Peaches, plums, watermelons (July-August)
- Bell peppers and summer squash



Fall

Fall markets overflow with hearty, storage-friendly produce that offers exceptional value. These vegetables form the foundation of comforting family meals as temperatures drop.

- Apples and pears (September-November)
- Winter squash varieties (acorn, butternut)
- Root vegetables (carrots, beets, potatoes)
- Broccoli and cauliflower

Winter

Even in colder months, Maryland farmers offer storage crops and greenhouse-grown items to keep your family nourished with local produce.

- Storage potatoes and onions
- Winter squash and sweet potatoes
- Greenhouse lettuces and microgreens
- Preserved summer bounty from your freezer

For maximum value and nutrition, focus your shopping on what's currently in season. Produce at peak season not only tastes better but typically costs less as farmers have abundant supply. Remember that vegetables like carrots, broccoli, and potatoes maintain relatively consistent availability and pricing year-round, making them reliable pantry staples regardless of season.

When shopping with children, encourage them to select a new seasonal fruit or vegetable to try each week. This builds excitement around healthy eating while teaching them about seasonal eating patterns and supporting local agriculture.

Proteins and Dairy

Maryland's farmers' markets offer excellent sources of protein that are both child-friendly and conducive to quick weeknight cooking. Local, sustainably raised proteins often have superior flavor and nutrition compared to mass-produced alternatives, making them worth seeking out despite sometimes higher price points.

Local Eggs and Poultry

Farm-fresh eggs from pasture-raised chickens serve as an affordable protein cornerstone in a family pantry. Their vibrant yolks indicate higher nutrient content, and their versatility makes them perfect for everything from breakfast scrambles to quick dinner frittatas that can incorporate leftover vegetables.

Local chicken is widely available at Maryland markets and typically more affordable than other meats. Look for whole chickens to maximize value 3 roast one for Sunday dinner, then use leftovers in sandwiches, salads, and soups throughout the week.

Maryland Seafood

The Chesapeake Bay's bounty appears seasonally at many markets. During summer and early fall, look for the famous Maryland blue crabs and locally caught fish. While seafood tends to be pricier, even small amounts can add significant flavor and nutrition to family meals.



Local Dairy Products

Maryland and neighboring Pennsylvania boast excellent dairies that supply markets with fresh milk, yogurt, and artisanal cheeses. These products typically contain fewer additives than mass-produced counterparts. While sometimes more expensive, their flavor and nutritional density often justify the cost.

- Plain yogurt: Buy in larger containers for better value, then add honey or seasonal fruit for kid-friendly breakfasts and snacks
- Versatile cheeses: Seek out mild varieties that appeal to children while working well in multiple dishes
- Local milk: Consider glass bottle options with deposit systems for environmental sustainability

For budget-conscious shoppers, consider planning one or two meatless meals weekly using eggs, beans, or dairy proteins. When purchasing more expensive proteins like specialty meats or seafood, use them in smaller quantities paired with plenty of seasonal vegetables and whole grains to create balanced, economical meals.

Whole Grains & Bread

Artisanal Breads

Local bakeries at Maryland farmers' markets create whole grain breads, bagels, and pitas that outshine grocery store versions in both flavor and nutrition. While these may cost more initially, their superior texture and taste mean children actually eat the crusts! Many market bakers use traditional fermentation methods that can make wheat more digestible for sensitive stomachs.

Budget tip: Ask about day-old bread specials near closing time, perfect for French toast, bread pudding, or homemade croutons.

Local Cornmeal

Maryland's agricultural heritage includes corn production, and some farmers still stone-grind cornmeal with exceptional flavor. This affordable staple transforms into cornbread, polenta, or coating for crispy fish. Stone-ground varieties retain more nutrients than highly processed versions and deliver more complex flavor that even picky eaters appreciate.

Kid-friendly idea: Make cornmeal pancakes topped with seasonal fruit for breakfast or breakfast-for-dinner nights.

Whole Oats

Several Maryland farms produce rolled or steel-cut oats that provide substantial nutrition at reasonable cost. These versatile grains serve as the foundation for breakfast porridge, homemade granola, or energy-packed cookies. When purchased in bulk from market vendors, oats often cost less than packaged grocery versions while delivering superior texture and flavor.

Time-saving tip: Prepare overnight oats with milk, yogurt and fruit for ready-to-eat breakfasts on busy mornings.

Incorporating whole grains into your family's diet becomes more sustainable when you find kid-friendly preparations. Look for smaller-batch producers at the market who may mill grains to order for maximum freshness. These minimally processed grains retain more nutrients and natural oils that contribute to both flavor and satiety, helping children feel fuller longer.

For families with busy schedules, consider prepping grain bases on weekends. Cook larger batches of oatmeal, rice, or other grains that can be quickly reheated and customized throughout the week. This approach saves time while ensuring whole grains remain a consistent part of your family's diet.

Remember that proper storage extends the shelf life of whole grains. Keep items like cornmeal and flour in airtight containers in cool locations to preserve their natural oils and prevent rancidity. Whole grains with minimal processing have shorter shelf lives than refined alternatives but deliver significantly better nutrition and flavor.



Healthy Family-Friendly Pantry Additions

Beyond fresh produce and staple proteins, Maryland farmers' markets offer specialty products that enhance meals while keeping nutrition in focus. These items bridge the gap between convenience and health, making them valuable additions to a family pantry.

Natural Sweeteners & Spreads

Local honey from Maryland beekeepers not only supports crucial pollinator populations but also provides a natural sweetener with trace minerals and potential allergy-relieving benefits. Use it to drizzle over yogurt, oatmeal, or toast for a healthier alternative to processed sugars. Many markets also feature locally produced nut butters made with minimal ingredients—just nuts and perhaps a touch of salt. These protein-rich spreads work perfectly for quick sandwiches, apple dipping, or adding to smoothies.

Preserved Fruits

Small-batch jams and fruit preserves capture seasonal flavors while using less sugar than commercial varieties. Look for producers who use traditional pectin-setting methods rather than high fructose corn syrup. These preserves transform ordinary toast into special breakfast treats and can be mixed into plain yogurt for quick, customized fruit-on-the-bottom cups that children love. Applesauce, particularly unsweetened varieties made from Maryland's excellent fall apples, provides a versatile snack, lunchbox addition, or baking ingredient.

Fermented Foods

Pickles, sauerkraut, and kimchi from market vendors introduce beneficial probiotics while adding instant flavor to meals. These fermented foods generally contain less sodium and fewer preservatives than mass-produced versions. Even pickle-resistant children often enjoy the crunch of locally made dill spears or bread and butter chips. These items extend vegetable consumption beyond seasons while supporting digestive health.

Salsas and Condiments

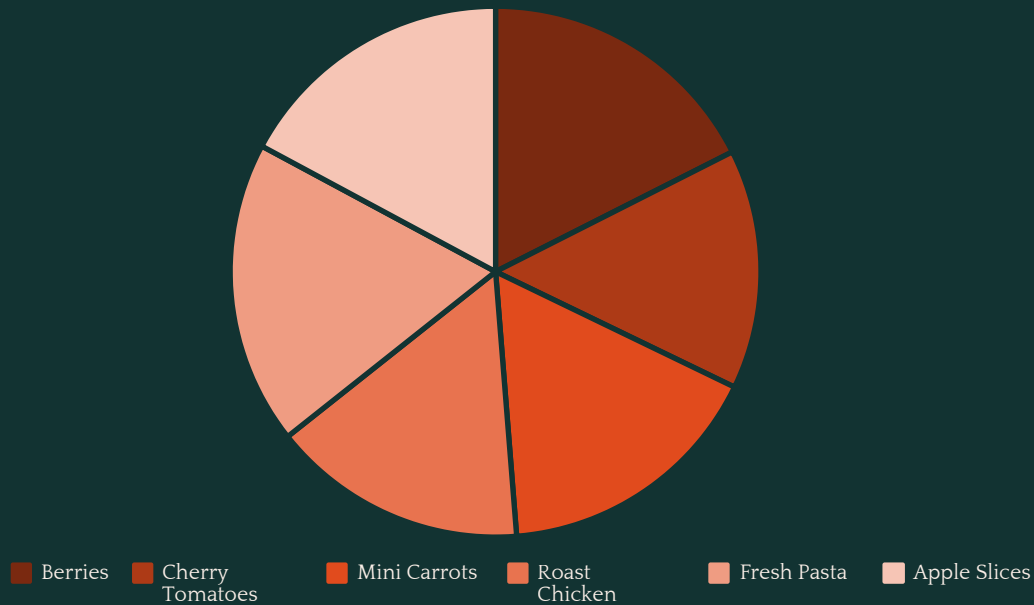
Locally produced salsas, hot sauces, and herb pestos add instant flavor to simple meals without artificial ingredients. These condiments transform basic ingredients—think eggs, rice bowls, or grilled chicken—into exciting meals with minimal effort. Look for varieties made with seasonal vegetables that might introduce children to new flavors in an approachable format.

Granola and Snack Items

Artisanal granolas typically contain higher quality ingredients and less sugar than commercial versions. These make perfect grab-and-go breakfast options or after-school snacks when paired with yogurt or milk. Some market vendors also offer dried fruit, roasted nuts, or even homemade energy bars that provide better nutrition than most packaged snacks.

When building your market-inspired pantry, allocate a portion of your budget to these specialty items that elevate everyday meals. While some carry premium prices, their concentrated flavors mean a little goes a long way. Their quality often inspires children to try new foods and appreciate more complex flavors than typical kids' products provide.

Kid-Approved Meal Building Blocks



Convenience doesn't have to mean processed foods. Maryland farmers' markets offer numerous partially-prepared or right-sized items that streamline meal preparation while maintaining nutritional integrity. These building blocks help busy parents assemble healthy meals and snacks with minimal effort.

Prepped Produce Packs

Many farmers now offer pre-washed, chopped vegetables that save valuable prep time. Look for stir-fry mixes, soup vegetable combinations, or salad greens that require no additional washing. While these convenience items typically cost more per pound than their whole counterparts, the time savings and reduced waste can justify the premium, especially during hectic weekdays.

For lunchboxes, seek out child-sized produce: cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, small apples, and berries that require minimal preparation while fitting perfectly in compartmentalized containers. These naturally portion-controlled options encourage healthy snacking without extensive preparation.

Ready-to-Eat Proteins

Rotisserie chickens, smoked turkey, or pre-cooked sausages from market vendors provide instant protein options for quick meals. Unlike supermarket versions, these typically contain fewer preservatives and come from locally raised animals. One rotisserie chicken can provide protein for multiple family meals 3 from simple sliced meat with vegetables to chicken salad sandwiches or soup additions.

Hard-boiled eggs from local producers make perfect protein-rich snacks or quick additions to salads and grain bowls. Some farmers sell these already peeled and ready to eat, saving valuable morning minutes.

Fresh Pasta and Bread Products

Handmade pasta from market vendors cooks much faster than dried varieties while delivering superior texture and flavor. Many children prefer the tender bite of fresh pasta, making it an excellent vehicle for introducing new vegetables in sauces. Similarly, par-baked pizza dough allows for quick assembly of homemade pizzas topped with market vegetables 3 an activity that encourages children to participate in meal preparation.

Fresh flour tortillas or flatbreads enable quick wrap sandwiches or quesadillas filled with market ingredients, perfect for nights when cooking time is limited but nutrition remains a priority. Building your family's diet around these market-fresh convenience items creates a sustainable approach to healthy eating that accommodates busy schedules. The slight premium paid for these items often yields returns in reduced food waste, increased vegetable consumption, and decreased reliance on heavily processed alternatives.

Budget Stretchers & Storage Tips

Seasonal shopping at Maryland farmers' markets can be budget-friendly when approached strategically. The key lies in understanding natural abundance cycles and maximizing preservation techniques to extend your investment across seasons.

Strategic Shopping Approaches

Plan your market visits with seasonal peaks in mind. Late summer brings tomato abundance, when prices drop as farmers need to move perishable inventory. Similarly, berries reach their lowest prices during mid-season when supply outpaces demand. Consider these strategies:

- Shop in the final hour when many vendors offer discounts rather than packing up unsold produce
- Ask about "seconds" 3 slightly imperfect produce that sells at reduced prices while maintaining nutritional value
- Build relationships with vendors who might offer loyalty discounts or throw in extra items for regular customers
- Purchase larger quantities of peak-season items when prices drop, then preserve for future use

Storage Maximization

Different produce requires specific storage approaches to maximize shelf life. Understanding these principles prevents waste and extends your food budget:

- Root vegetables (potatoes, onions, winter squash): Store in cool, dark places with good ventilation, not refrigerated
- Leafy greens: Wrap in slightly damp paper towels inside open plastic bags in the refrigerator
- Berries: Only wash immediately before eating to prevent mold; store in single layers when possible
- Herbs: Treat like flowers in glasses of water, covered loosely with plastic bags

Average Savings

Shopping end-of-market discounts can save up to 40% on produce prices

Waste Reduction

Proper storage techniques can reduce household food waste by approximately 30%

Seasonal Premium

Out-of-season produce typically costs 25% more than in-season equivalents

Teaching children about these preservation processes builds their connection to seasonal eating patterns while developing practical food skills. Even young children can participate in sorting berries for freezing or layering vegetables in storage containers, creating educational opportunities around food sustainability.



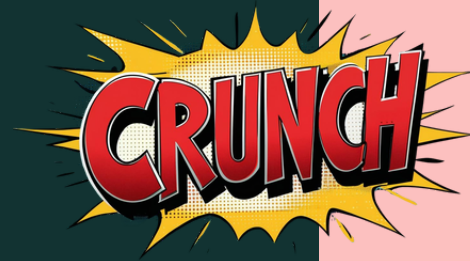
Preservation Techniques

Extending seasonal abundance requires simple preservation strategies accessible to busy families:

- Freezing: Berries, corn kernels, peas, and chopped peppers freeze beautifully with minimal preparation
- Simple refrigerator pickling: Extends cucumber, pepper, and carrot life with minimal effort
- Pesto making: Convert abundant summer basil into freezable pesto portions
- Roasting and freezing: Transform excess tomatoes into concentrated flavor bases for winter soups

Zero-Waste Approaches

Create vegetable stock from scraps (carrot tops, onion skins, celery ends) collected in a freezer container. When full, simmer for nutrient-rich broth that forms the base for soups and grain cooking. Wilting greens can be blended into pestos or added to soups, extending their usefulness beyond salad applications.



Quick, Versatile Healthy Meal Ideas

With your Maryland farmers' market pantry established, transform seasonal finds into quick, nutritious meals that appeal to the whole family. These flexible templates adapt to whatever produce is currently abundant and can be customized to accommodate picky eaters.

Grain Bowls: The Ultimate Adaptable Meal

Start with a base of cooked local grains (rice, farro, or quinoa), then layer with roasted seasonal vegetables, a protein source, and a simple dressing. Children appreciate the ability to customize their portions and try components separately.

- Spring version: Farro with asparagus, peas, soft-boiled eggs, and lemon vinaigrette
- Summer version: Rice with cherry tomatoes, corn, grilled chicken, and basil oil
- Fall version: Quinoa with roasted butternut squash, kale, chickpeas, and maple tahini dressing

Time-saving tip: Cook grains in larger batches once weekly. Roast vegetables whenever you have the oven on for other purposes.

Upgraded Sandwiches & Wraps

Elevate the humble sandwich with farmers' market ingredients for quick lunches or light dinners. The key is using quality bread or wraps as the foundation, then adding layers of flavor and nutrition.

- Market vegetable wraps with hummus, local cheese, and seasonal vegetables
- Open-faced tartines on artisanal bread topped with ricotta, honey, and whatever fruit is in season
- Upgraded grilled cheese with market sourdough, local cheese, and thin apple slices

Kid-friendly approach: Set up a DIY sandwich bar and let children build their own combinations.

One-Pot Wonders

These complete meals minimize cleanup while maximizing flavor, perfect for busy weeknights. The formula remains consistent while ingredients change seasonally.

- Spring green skillet: Local sausage sautéed with spring onions, new potatoes, and asparagus
- Summer vegetable paella: Rice cooked with market tomatoes, peppers, and available protein
- Fall harvest stew: Market chicken, sweet potatoes, kale, and apples in cider broth

Budget strategy: These one-pot meals stretch smaller amounts of protein with abundant vegetables and grains.

Breakfast for Dinner

Transforming breakfast classics into dinner options offers nutritious meals that children rarely reject. The protein and vegetable content distinguishes these from their sweeter morning counterparts.

- Vegetable frittata using whatever market produce needs using up
- Savory oatmeal bowls topped with roasted vegetables and a fried egg
- Dinner pancakes: Cornmeal or buckwheat versions topped with sautéed seasonal fruit

Nutrition boost: Add grated vegetables to pancake or waffle batter for hidden nutrients in kid-friendly formats.

Remember that simplicity often yields the most sustainable family meal strategies. The goal isn't culinary perfection but rather building consistent habits around seasonal, nutrient-dense ingredients. By maintaining a well-stocked pantry with farmers' market finds, you create a foundation for countless healthy meals that can be assembled quickly while still delivering the flavors and nutrition your family deserves.

For the busiest nights, don't hesitate to combine market items with quality store-bought components. A rotisserie chicken paired with a simple market salad or high-quality pasta tossed with farmers' market vegetables still delivers superior nutrition to most takeout options. The beauty of a Maryland farmers' market pantry lies in its flexibility³ providing building blocks for elaborate weekend cooking projects and last-minute weeknight meals alike.



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