



Get Sprung: How to Enjoy Spring Produce Like a D.C. Chef

By DCist Contributor [Elizabeth Packer](#)

This week DCist is getting sprung for spring. All week long we'll be spotlighting ways to eat and cook the bounty of fruits and vegetables that are finally peeking their little green heads out of the soil.



Birds are chirping, the sun is shining, cherry blossoms are peaking, Nationals Stadium is once again abuzz with fans ... spring has officially arrived in D.C. To welcome the new season, chefs around the city have been doing a spring cleaning of sorts, updating their menus to reflect the arrival and availability of new produce. It's time to say goodbye to the root veggies and hearty greens of winter, and welcome spring's bounty. Just as gardeners delight in their first blooms, the arrival of spring heralds a new chapter in kitchens across the city. It's worth venturing out in the coming weeks to sample the best of spring at one of the city's many restaurants debuting spring menus full of dishes showcasing local, seasonal

The first step to embrace the season is to get your feet wet. Of the twelve chefs mentioned in this article, their excitement about the new season is hard to get past. Ramps are coveted for their unique flavor and texture—and their versatility in the kitchen.

As Chef Ethan McKee, chef at Tico (1926 14th Street NW), says, ramps are the most fun to work with. He tries to buy as many as he can and freeze the pureed greens for use throughout the season.

While ramps may hog the spotlight, there's plenty of other fruits and vegetables to get excited about. Chef David Fritsche of Café Dupont (1500 New Hampshire Avenue NW) sums up the joy the new season brings: "After winter with all its roots and grains, it's awesome to see how spring is lighting up the colors, textures and flavors." Fresh peas, morel mushrooms, asparagus, artichokes, mixed lettuces, rhubarb, and a variety of fresh herbs are all now emerging after a long winter.

For chefs, it's a relief to have access to such a bounty—George Rodrigues, chef at Tico (1926 14th Street NW), said spring is the most exciting time of the year for a chef. Chef Kyoo Eom of Poste (700 F Street NW) sees spring produce as imbued with a special meaning.

"They fought the whole winter season and then they wait until the weather is just right," Eom writes in an email. "They are more than just spring produce, they're new life."

Since cooking with the seasons means limiting yourself to what's locally available, the winter months can be daunting. Baker Mark Furstenburg of Bread Furst (4434 Connecticut Avenue NW) is certainly ready to welcome spring staples like peas, asparagus and spring greens into his kitchen. "I'm so tired of butternut squash. I bought 500 pounds of it and had to invent ways to use it." When the farmer cooperatives Furstenburg sources from recently offered jerusalem artichokes, he jumped at the new produce and will soon feature a jerusalem artichoke and arugula salad on his menu.

On the sweeter side of things, chef Meredith Tomason of Rare Sweets (963 Palmer Alley NW) welcomes back rhubarb and herbs like lemon verbena and black mint, allowing her to freshen up her menu of cakes and ice creams with offerings like rhubarb lemon cake and lemon verbena sorbet.

To showcase the area's best, chefs cultivate relationships with local farmers in the Md.-Va.-Pa. region and visit city farmers' markets to find inspiration and to seek out the freshest ingredients. Chef Michael Bonk of The Pig (1320 14th Street NW) changes his menu daily based on what's available from EatWell Natural Farm, the

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restaurants in the Eat-Well Natural Farm. "No one else has a rooftop garden like this," Bonk said. "No one else has a rooftop garden like this, so I had to cook, to keep it simple and fresh."

Richard Jones does a similar thing at his restaurant. "I'll literally just go to the garden and pick the freshest and at its peak," he says. "I do, and keeps the crew

further by growing their own produce on site. Urbana has a rooftop garden planted with heirloom varieties of Italian greens, lettuces, squashes, and tomatoes. Chef McKee sought out lesser known varieties that not many other people in the area are growing, and this year hopes to do specials throughout the season made fully from ingredients grown in the garden.

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