



wvfarmers.org

WEEK FOUR

Culinary Exploration of Specialty Crops

Information provided with funding provided by USDA Specialty Crop

Week Four Overview

- **Purpose and Goals:** The purpose of this session is to introduce participants to cooking with specialty crops, explore their culinary versatility, and highlight how locally grown West Virginia crops can enhance meals with flavor, nutrition, and creativity.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Identify common West Virginia specialty crops used in cooking
 - Understand how to prepare and incorporate these crops into recipes
 - Experience the flavor and versatility of nutrient-rich foods
 - Apply culinary techniques to create dishes using specialty crops



Specialty Crop Review

Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, herbs, nuts, and other crops grown primarily for direct consumption. They are nutrient-dense, flavorful, and often locally grown, making them ideal for cooking and home gardening.

Popular West Virginia Specialty Crops:

- Apples & peaches
- Berries: strawberries, blueberries, blackberries
- Tomatoes & peppers
- Pumpkins & squash
- Herbs: basil, mint, parsley



Culinary Benefits: Flavor, Color & Texture

Specialty crops are not only nutritious but also add flavor, color, and texture that make meals more enjoyable and satisfying.

Using these crops in your cooking can:

- Add natural sweetness or savory depth – Fruits like apples, peaches, and berries provide natural sweetness, while vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, and squash add savory richness without extra sugar or salt.
- Provide vibrant colors and textures – A mix of reds, greens, oranges, and purples from specialty crops makes dishes visually appealing and encourages healthier eating habits.
- Enhance culinary creativity – Herbs, squash, berries, and other crops inspire new flavor combinations, recipes, and cooking techniques, letting home cooks experiment with both traditional and contemporary dishes.



Culinary Benefits: Nutrition & Balanced Diet



Specialty crops also play a key role in supporting a diverse, balanced, and flavorful diet:

- Retain nutrients with simple cooking methods – Steaming, roasting, sautéing, or lightly grilling specialty crops preserves vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants while enhancing natural flavors.
- Support a balanced diet – Specialty crops can be incorporated into breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks, offering variety and helping ensure a broad spectrum of nutrients.
- Make meals more seasonal and local – Using locally grown West Virginia specialty crops emphasizes freshness, supports sustainable agriculture, and connects meals to the regional food system.



Farm-to-Table Culture in WV

West Virginia's farm-to-table culture is a vibrant movement celebrating local food, community heritage, and fresh, Appalachian flavors, seen in popular farm dinners at state parks, unique restaurants like Hill & Hollow, and initiatives like FarmFreshWV and the West Virginia Grown program, connecting consumers directly to producers for seasonal, handcrafted meals and supporting local economies.

- **Community Focus** – Strong support for small family farms, with a genuine sense of pride and connection to the land.
- **Diverse Offerings** – From gourmet dinners at farms like Fish Hawk Acres to gastropubs using local ingredients.
- **Agritourism** – Farms and state parks host events like dinners and tours, offering immersive experiences.



Lost Creek Farm Lost Creek, WV

Farm & Forage Supper Club

Run by James Beard-nominated chefs Mike Costello and Amy Dawson, Lost Creek Farm champions story-rich mountain cuisine and Appalachian heritage.

Their Farm & Forage Supper Club blends heirloom crops, wild foraged ingredients, and farm-grown vegetables into multi-course dinners.

Signature dishes feature apple butter, regional apples, ramps, heritage beans, squash, and other specialty crops, connecting guests with the community's food culture.



Chef Ke Charleston, WV

Community Focused Cuisine

Charleston native Keyarna “Chef Ke” Frederick focuses on community-centered, locally sourced specialty crops, addressing food deserts and expanding access to fresh produce.

She participates in statewide dinner series like Cellar to Table, which highlight WV-grown heirloom vegetables, fruits, and other specialty crops in seasonal menus.



Hill & Hollow Morgantown, WV

Appalachian Eats

Hill & Hollow, a restaurant and café in Morgantown, is dedicated to sustainable, farm-to-table dining, sourcing most ingredients locally, including ramps, seasonal greens, and other specialty crops.

Chef Marion Ohlinger blends Appalachian traditions with global techniques, often featuring heirloom vegetables, mushrooms, and regionally grown produce.

The menu demonstrates how fresh, local specialty crops elevate flavor while reflecting West Virginia's agricultural bounty.



The Vagabond Kitchen Wheeling, WV

Rooted in Mountain Cuisine

Vagabond Kitchen, led by Chef Matt Welsch, elevates regional flavors with menus built around WV specialty crops, emphasizing local fruits, vegetables, and artisanal products.

Welsch sources directly from West Virginia producers and highlights heirloom and heritage crops in innovative Appalachian dishes.

The restaurant has been featured in the WV Grown partner program for its commitment to specialty crop sourcing and local ingredients.



Alma Bea

Shepherdstown, WV

A Taste of Appalachia Heritage

Alma Bea focuses on Appalachian food traditions reimaged by chef leadership that honors regional heritage and seasonal specialty crops, including heirloom vegetables and locally grown fruits.

The restaurant embodies local flavor narratives through a seasonally inspired menu sourced from WV farms and specialty crop producers.

Executive Chef Mary Ellen Diaz brings experience and passion for Appalachian cuisine, showcasing WV specialty crops as central ingredients.



Supporting WV's Culinary Movement



- Visit local farms and farm-to-table events to taste WV specialty crops in seasonal menus and agritourism experiences.
- Explore WV Grown products at markets and restaurants to support producers of heirloom and specialty crops.
- Support chefs and culinary artisans who celebrate West Virginia's food identity through the creative use of local specialty crops.



Discussion Prompts: Culinary Exploration of Specialty Crops

- What specialty crops do you already enjoy cooking with, and how do you typically prepare them?
- How do fruits, vegetables, or herbs change the flavor or creativity of the dishes you make?
- What specialty crops have you seen at farmers' markets or stores that you would like to try cooking with?
- How might cooking with seasonal or locally grown crops influence the meals you prepare at home?
- What cooking techniques (roasting, sautéing, baking, etc.) do you enjoy using when preparing fruits or vegetables?
- In what ways could specialty crops be incorporated into everyday meals such as breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snacks?
- How might cooking with locally grown specialty crops help support local farmers and strengthen community connections?



Activity: Cooking Class

Overview: Participants will take part in a cooking class led by a local chef to explore how specialty crops can be used in everyday meals.

Workshop Focus:

- Recipe Preparation – Demonstrating how to prepare dishes using seasonal specialty crops
- Flavor & Nutrition – Exploring how fruits, vegetables, and herbs enhance taste and nutritional value

Workshop Goals:

- Learn practical cooking skills using locally grown specialty crops
- Explore new ways to incorporate fruits, vegetables, and herbs into meals
- Experience the flavor and versatility of specialty crops through tasting and discussion

