

Buy local and keep it simple



with ARIA
Restaurant chef
Matt Moran

It's nice to see Australians are embracing seasonality and developing a growing awareness of the importance of using local produce. Despite the convenience of being able to get anything we want whenever we want, there is something to be said for local produce.

It makes sense that the less distance your food has travelled, the better it will be in terms of freshness and flavour and the better it is for the planet. Local is best.

At the more extreme end of the spectrum are 'locavores' — people who only eat food grown

in their own gardens or produced in their immediate area, which is more challenging than it sounds.

It is always better to use local produce rather than imports. Just because it's possible to have US cherries in the middle of winter doesn't mean we should buy them. Why not wait until summer, when the Aussie crop is bountiful and beautiful, the weather is balmy and Christmas is just around the corner? There's something to be said for anticipation.

Imports can't compare to the wonderful Australian asparagus of spring and summer

Asparagus is another case in point. Although available throughout winter, it can be lacklustre in flavour and texture. Mostly imported, it cannot be compared to the wonderful Australian asparagus that graces the greengrocers'

shelves in spring and summer. Now is the best time to cook those elegant green spears.

Asparagus is perishable and best eaten on the day of picking, although unfortunately this isn't a reality for many of us. Asparagus is very easy to cook but notoriously difficult to grow. Make a point of seeing where the asparagus has been grown and choose the one that has travelled the shortest distance — there's that local produce idea again.

Try to buy bunches secured with tape rather than elastic bands, which can damage the delicate spears.

Always buy crisp asparagus with tightly furled heads; avoid woody, split ends and wrinkled stems. Buy only what you intend to cook in the next day or so and refrigerate

in the crisper for no more than two days. Green asparagus is the most common but white is becoming increasingly available and then there's purple asparagus, too, so grab some of these if you come across them.

When it comes to preparation, asparagus is low-maintenance. The white variety has much tougher ends, which will need to be peeled. With the green, you can peel the ends for a fine-dining touch but you don't have to.

To cook, simple is absolutely best. Let the asparagus shine. Blanch until tender — the stem should bend but never droop — and crown with a golden dollop of hollandaise.

With a plate of this in front of me, life is good. Local produce. In season. Simple.

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