

The flavors of fall

Find them at season's many farm markets

BY A. C. McMULLEN

Shining red apples, squash in its various shapes and colors, bright ears of Indian corn, baskets of dark blueberries, succulent tomatoes, tender zucchini, bundles of fresh herbs and, of course, bins of pumpkins — all the delicious bounty of the season's harvest makes autumn prime time for farmer's markets in northern Michigan.

Many people consider fall the end. Time to put away the boat. Time to shutter the cottage. Time to await the inevitable coming of winter. But farm markets are just coming into their glory. Acres of vegetable crops are at their lavish and beautiful best, and so are the flower gardens that frequently welcome shoppers to the farm.

A visit to a farm market is an essential ingredient in your fall color tour, a wonderful way to get to know some real, salt-of-the-earth northern Michiganders. And — need we say — it's the best way to get fresh, locally grown produce picked at the peak of its texture and flavor.

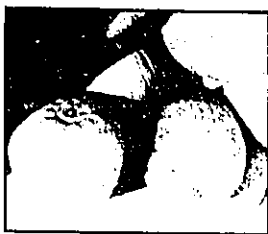
For many, a trip to the farm market is a thrice-weekly event. That way, they get the crispest lettuce, the snappiest green beans, the newest new potatoes. But for those who aren't fortunate enough to live in rural America, farm market shopping is strictly a holiday activity during which they stock up on homemade specialty jams, jellies, honey, horseradish and other condiments that celebrate the goodness of Mother Earth's gifts and the skill of the person in the kitchen.

When the autumn air is tinged with the scent of fallen leaves, fallen apples are gathered and pressed into fresh cider — another farm market specialty. Add potted chrysanthemums for the last splash of color in your landscape, or gourds and dried flowers to keep a reminder of life during the dormant season.

One of the granddaddies of farm markets in the Petokey area is Hinkley's, located a half-mile west of the Crestview Mall on Sheridan Street. When the Hinkley family began the farm market 45 years ago, there was nothing on their crop and tree-covered hillside to indicate the area would ever be nipped away by urban sprawl.

Today, that feeling of being "out in the country" still prevails, even though the beaten path has gotten closer to the garage that serves as their store.

A few things have changed, however. When the Hinkleys originally opened their market, the words "No Sunday Trade" were painted on the walls. Today's generation of Hinkleys, Fred and Heidi, have bowed to



the demands of their generation and are now open 7 days.

"We always went by the honor system," Heidi says. "People would come by, pick out what they wanted, and leave their money in the jar. But the wrong people found out about it. We moved indoors this year for the first time."

Wintergreen Herbs and Potpourri is a farm market with a twist.

Mary Lee Huber and her family have worked for 12 years to develop the thriving business that showcases her primary emphasis: flowers and herbs.

Using beautiful things from the farm to provide a natural aesthetic for the home has been a successful niche for Wintergreen. Huber started the business so she could be a stay-at-home mom and continue to use the commercial acumen she developed during a career in marketing and sales.

Located on Burnett Road east of U.S. 31 between Charlevoix and Petokey, a once soil-poor meadow now blooms with theme gardens that Huber loves to design for her clientele. Stroll the shade garden, the fragrance garden, the Shakespearean garden, the Biblical garden, the rock wall garden, the cottage garden and so on.

When the plants have peaked, they are plucked for fresh flower bouquets, dried and worked into everlasting wreaths and arrangements. They're also tossed into scented oils for potpourri or steeped in vinegar to lend their flavor to creative chefs.

To round out the selection of herbal and floral decorative items Huber and



Record-Eagle/A.C. McMullen
Crowds always turn out for fall produce at Bill's Farm Market in Petokey.

her sister, Alice Dunkel, produce. Wintergreen also carries a variety of condiments and cosmetics with herbal and floral ingredients.

In the process of building her business, Huber has given her son, Bryant, a taste of entrepreneurship. Dunkel's daughter, Holly, also has sampled the business world. They help in the gardens, charm the customers and sometimes even sell their own garden vegetables.

That's how Bill McMaster got started back in elementary school. His family encouraged him to set a table of produce out on the road in front of their farm on East Mitchell Road. He went away to college and got his bachelor's degree in business. But as the saying goes, you can take the boy from the farm, but you can't take the farm from the boy.

McMaster came back home and before long was back into cultivating, planting, weeding, harvesting and selling garden produce. In 1982, he put up the building

now known as Bill's Farm Market, which in season, keeps McMaster working longer and harder than many CEOs. When winter comes, he puts on a contractor's hat and pounds nails.

During the growing season, McMaster chats with old family friends who come to inquire about his mother and pick up a couple of vine-ripened tomatoes. He answers customers' questions and works about 50 acres of farmland, some of it planted in Christmas trees but most of it in sweet corn, cabbage, potatoes, garden vegetables and flowers.

This fall, because summer arrived so late, Bill and other farmers are hoping for an extended warm season. And they've added Christmas trees and wreaths to their inventory of goods so they'll be open well beyond the drop of the last pretty leaf.

Still, there's nothing like a golden autumn afternoon to bring out the best in the farm market way of life.

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