



# On the Menu

Monterey County is an extraordinary destination for fine dining: our restaurant scene is spurred by the ocean's bounty and year-round produce.

Food is a powerful thing. Family traditions are built around holiday meals, romances begin over candlelit dinners, friendships are strengthened by confidences exchanged over lunch.

Here in Monterey, we head to bayside clam-chowder cafés after kayaking the bay, and sumptuous oceanside restaurants when we want to celebrate. We whisper to friends about discovering an out-of-the-way place making deep-fried artichoke hearts just steps from the fields, and take our guests to elegant award-winning restaurants on tree-lined town streets.

When you're ready to dine, you can choose between restaurants specializing in sushi, barbecue, or fresh fish, from bistros that serve Indian tandoori to cafés tossing California Cobb salads, all with prize-winning wines. We even have restaurants where dogs are welcomed on sheltered patios – and offered their very own menus. Read on to learn about local specialities, the produce that is transformed by our award-winning chefs, and much more.

## Starting from the Basics

Monterey's unparalleled culinary tradition springs from a lucky combination of climate and geology which encourages robustly flavored signature crops such as strawberries, artichokes, garlic, lettuce and a variety of mushrooms. In addition, a veritable United Nations of nationalities have settled in the county, so that you'll find

*continued on page 76*



### Quick Flick to...

Page **83** To learn more about the importance of agriculture to Monterey County – and to your dinner table at home, too.



Page **87** To learn more about the bay's bountiful seafood harvest, and what you can do to keep our world's seafood stocks healthy.



Page **92** To check out some great events related to fine dining, excellent wines and Monterey County produce.





## Where 'A' Is for Artichoke –

And Agriculture. Where 'B' is for berries, and 'C' is for celery...

Warm, sunny days, ocean breezes and mild nights combine with sandy loam soil, typical in the fertile Pajaro and Salinas valleys, to provide the perfect climate for growing, well, almost anything.

It's perfect for strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries, in cobblers, ice cream, pies, or just fresh from a farm stand.

The same climate so conducive to berry growing also favors the artichoke. Originally a native of the Mediterranean, artichokes were introduced to Monterey County by Castroville ranchers in 1924. The artichoke is in the thistle family, and the "vegetable" we eat is actually the plant's flower bud. The largest buds are at the end of the long central stalks which can easily be seen from your car while driving through North Monterey County in late April and May. Artichokes are available year-round, and celebrated at the Castroville Artichoke Festival each May.

*continued on page 78*

## What's in season when and where

There's scarcely a day in the year when the motorist rolling through Monterey County won't see a lush field of sprouting, blooming, ready-to-harvest somethings. Here's a quick seasonal guide to which crops peak when, and where you're likely to see them — but as they say in Monterey's farmer's market, "Around here, we can grow strawberries 13 months a year."

When	What	Where
January	broccoli leeks	northeast of Salinas, River Road west of Chualar southern end of the county, near Greenfield
February	Brussels sprouts	along Highway One, south of Moss Landing
March	green onions asparagus	near Old Stage Road, east of Salinas west of Highway 101, south of Gonzales
April	artichokes cauliflower	many acres surrounding Castroville northeast of Salinas, River Road west of Chualar
May	artichokes	many acres surrounding Castroville
June	strawberries	along Highway One and San Juan Grade Road
July	romaine & leaf lettuces	due east of Highway 101, between River Road and Spreckels Blvd.
August	spinach fennel	southeast of Salinas, along Highway 101 along Highway One and Route 183
September	iceberg lettuce	due east of Highway 101
October	broccoli celery	northeast of Salinas, River Road west of Chualar east of Highway 101, north and south of Chualar
November	Brussels sprouts iceberg lettuce	along Highway One, south of Moss Landing due east of Highway 101
December	onions	west of Highway 101, south of Greenfield



*Continued from page 78*

bowl from the people who work hard every day to keep it filled up? The National Steinbeck Center's Agriculture Wing serves up learning about the region's farmyard heritage in a way that is fun and interesting for all ages.

And if you're ready to see your supper in its native habitat, it's easy to go out to the fields and vineyards for a first-hand look. We have several farms with acres under cultivation expressly to show 'townies' how the fresh veggies come to be in the microwave bag, and tour operators who can literally put you in the middle of a 15-acre strawberry patch. Wineries can take serious visitors on tours of the facilities with advance notice; others provide tours during seasonal special events.

Our intensive agricultural community

makes Monterey County a destination for farmers and scientists the world over to observe cutting its edge practices.

## Lots of Green in Lettuce

Monterey County is one of the nation's leading agricultural producers, and the third largest ag economy in California. Our temperate climate, rich soils, and unparalleled infrastructure support system make us the ideal place to grow cool season veggies, wine grapes, strawberries and flowers. We're also good at packaged salads and pre-cut fresh vegetables, with 90% of the market supplied by our growers and packers. Because the agriculture here is year round and highly labor intensive, Monterey County has California's highest agricultural payroll at \$408.6 million.

In 2004, the value of Monterey County agriculture was \$3,392,309,318. Over



41 individual commodities each gross over one million dollars, from #1 leaf lettuce at \$544 million, to #41 herbs at \$1.4 million.

Although known as the Salad Bowl of the World, we produce lots of other commodities besides the \$2.5 billion in vegetable crops. Our diverse agriculture includes fruits and nuts (\$529 million),

*Continued on page 85*

Sardine Factory ad



*Continued from page 83*

field crops (\$15.5 million), livestock and poultry (\$39 million), and seed crops (a mere \$7 million).

Strange and wonderful things happen in the world of vegetables. In 2004, many crops grew in value by leaps and bounds, including spinach, artichokes and strawberries; for the first time, romaine lettuce surpassed head lettuce as our biggest seller. Wine grapes increased in value dramatically, with many varieties fetching more than \$1000 a ton.

If you live in a city, it may be hard to picture 8000 tons of cilantro, the aromatic herb used in Mexican and Asian cooking, or 7400 tons of raspberries, or 30 million roses. Our farmers produce that much every year. Who knows, maybe your dinner table will come straight from Monterey tonight!



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