



Five Farm-Fresh Treats

Don't leave the Charleston Farmers Market without sampling these flavors



Gerard Kieran creates wonderful omelets every Saturday at the market.

Most people go to a farmers' market to get things to eat *later*.

But in Charleston, more than two dozen cooks, chefs, and food producers transform leafy Marion Square into a sprawling open-air cafe every Saturday, doing brilliant things with an amazing variety of freshly plucked produce, organic meats, charcuterie, and handmade cheeses and pastas. They produce fresh foods from sunrise until early afternoon, offering tastes you won't soon forget (and most everything runs \$8 or under). Here are a few of our favorites.

1 | Tasty Brunch

"I love breakfast!" says Gerard Kieran, who's been turning out top-notch omelets at the farmers' market for nearly a decade. Although this chef was born and trained in Ireland, his travels throughout





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Central America inspire flavors for his dishes, from the mango salsa that accompanies spinach and feta omelets to the fiery Ecuadorian hot sauce—Gerard says it's a cross between salsa and chowchow—in his popular shrimp and grits and barbecue. To wash it all down, Gerard brews ginger tea from fresh gingerroot. The spicy Costa Rican elixir delivers a punch of zesty warmth on a still-brisk spring morning and is served with ice in the summer. 843/557-4521

2 | Melt

Nathan Albertson doesn't know what he'll put into his sensational hot sandwiches at Melt until Thursday, when he picks up his produce from a local farmer. Then he goes to work, crafting offbeat combinations like steamed local shrimp with guacamole and lemon crème fraîche and updating old favorites like a BLT with fresh mozzarella, heirloom tomatoes, and a dash of balsamic glaze over the Tuscan bread. Condiments are special too, particularly Nathan's sweet potato mustard dressing, roasted red pepper cream, and jalapeño pepper Ranch dressing. meltcharleston.com

3 | Charleston Crêpe Company

The line forms early at this crêperie, where Rachel and Jack Byrne fill gossamer-thin crêpes with more than 20 inspired combinations ranging from salami and cheese to Nutella and strawberries. Rachel and Jack started their crêpe cookery in 1998 after spending years traveling the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Melt owner Nathan Albertson doesn't know what kind of gourmet sandwiches he's going to prepare until he picks up his fresh produce; Rachel and Jack Byrne worked in restaurants around the world before settling in Charleston to open their crêpe company.

7:35 pm:
Stew's on.



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world together and working in restaurants from Belgium to Thailand. Their knowledge of world cuisine and Charleston-area food providers comes through in their fun, fresh ingredients. Try the healthy but hearty Egg Veggie, with mushrooms, onions, and other local produce, or a deceptively simple Cheddar and chicken crêpe, a favorite of their 9-year-old daughter, Abby. For dessert, a handcrafted piece of dark chocolate peanut or pecan toffee or an entire 25-layer crêpe cake (available in chocolate or vanilla) are both one-of-a-kind indulgences. charlestoncrepecompany.com

4 | Southern Sisters

New Yorkers Ase and Stuart Zablow spent years perfecting the formula for their now-famous benne-seed wafers

(the company is named for their daughters). They perused cookbooks for recipes and tested the cookies on local friends until the color, texture, and flavor were finally perfect. The couple sells batches of benne wafers and Charleston tea cookies every day, but if you don't have a sweet tooth, try one of the gigantic soft pretzels hot from the oven. "New Yorkers know their pretzels," says Ase. "We use a special blend of flour so they're chewy, and every one is hand-rolled." 843/801-2665

5 | Fresh Pickle Works

Kosher dills, half sours, and bread-and-butter pickles are just the beginning at Fresh Pickle Works. "We'll pickle anything we can get our hands on," laughs owner Alexis Kong-Van de Wiel. With great success too. It turns out that local green



tomatoes, beans, okra, zucchini and even collard greens take just as well to a good long soak in Alexis's specially spiced brines, coming out pickled, crunchy and full of flavor. And Alexis doesn't mind giving out free samples of her pickles. But be careful, some are pretty spicy—and you may not relish the experience. 843/469-1228 **SL**

GOING TO THE MARKET

The Charleston Farmers Market is open 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Saturday April 9-December 18 in Marion Square, between King and Meeting streets in the Upper King Street Design District. Although there's no printed guide to the vendors, the staff in the market's information booth (located on the King Street side of the Francis Marion Hotel), will be happy to show you the way. charlestonarts.sc



Still Hungry?

Here are five more market spots to tempt your taste buds.

CAFÉ TIPPENEAUX

Authentic beignets, po'boys, chicory coffee, and other New Orleans fare from Natchez-raised Adrian Tipples

MIKE'S PEANUTS

Deep-fried peanuts, shell and all

THE MESSY APRON

Farm-fresh soups and salads packaged for eating on the go

RIVER RUN FARMS

South Carolina-grown kiwis, ripe and ready to scoop (spoon included); homemade kiwi ice cream too

MEATHOUSE

Smoked meats and pâté from Jason Houser



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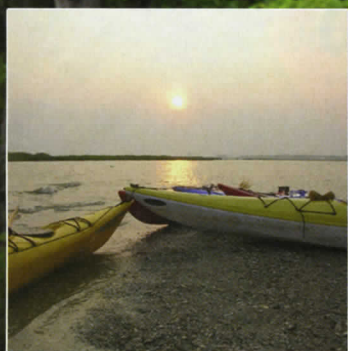
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Grā Moore and
a Black Guinea too
cute to be dinner



A South Carolina Classic: **Black Guinea Hogs**

South Carolina is producing some of the
world's best-tasting pork

In a world gone pork crazy, the Black Guinea hog is a foodie's porcine dream. Originally brought over from West Africa in the early 1800s—Thomas Jefferson had a documented herd in 1804—Guineas were the most common pig in the South. Now you can find dozens of the once-dying breed in the Palmetto State.

Small and docile and packed with lard perfect for cooking (fat accounts for roughly 50% of its body weight), this swine was ideal for a homestead. Up until World War II, it was even bred for its amazing fat-producing skills. Its lard, in addition to making piecrusts and biscuits, was used to grease engines in the industrial South. Then along came synthetic

lubricants and a health-crazed public that ran from the dreaded F-A-T. The breed's population drastically declined, almost to the point of extinction. Enter South Carolina farmer Grā Moore from Pamplico and chef Craig Deihl of the restaurant Cypress in Charleston.

Grā wanted to raise some pigs on a small 5-acre patch and looked to the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy to find a rare heritage breed. Now he's raising one of the nation's largest herds (still only about 35 pigs) in a forested area, where the Black Guineas live mostly on foraged acorns, wild persimmons, and vegetables such as heirloom corn.

Craig, a bona fide pork enthusiast, was looking for flavor. And the Black Guinea, known for its rich but subtle gamy flavor and high percentage of omega-3 fatty acids (pork fat = deliciousness), more than filled the bill. "It's super pork-y, with nutty characteristics and creamy fat," says Craig. "And tender like you wouldn't believe!"

Here's the best part. By cooking with the Guineas, Craig increases the demand. Those lucky enough to be a member of his meat-based Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program get to sample it in the form of charcuterie such as cured coppa and saucisson sec. For the rest of us, the best way to get a taste is to go to Cypress. You won't find it on the menu, but listen closely when the waiter tells you about the specials. Guinea hog porchetta, stuffed with mortadella, smoked, and served with bacon jam and chanterelles? Yes, please. **SL**

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