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# Local Farms: U-pick tradition still strong in Brentwood

Oakland Tribune, May 22, 2009 by Tom Powers

For generations, Bay Area families have been visiting Brentwood to u-pick a cornucopia of fresh fruits and vegetables. Many of us who grew up in the Bay Area have wonderful memories of going out to Brentwood every summer to pick cherries, apricots and peaches. And the Brentwood u-pick tradition is still going strong.

On the east side of Mount Diablo, Brentwood's family farms are home to dozens of u-pick orchards and roadside stands. Cherry season has become the most popular time to visit Brentwood farms, which have almost 300 acres of u-pick cherry orchards. From mid-May to early June, different varieties of the cherries ripen -- beginning with the early Corals, then Brooks, Bings, white Raniers and ending with the Montmorency sour cherries that are so delicious in pies.

More than cherries

Brentwood u-pick farms also offer Bay Area residents an opportunity to pick tree-ripened fruit, enjoy a local farm experience and celebrate the season all summer long. In mid-June, the unique Brentwood "angelcots" and the delicate, exquisite Blenheim apricots are ready to enjoy. The Blenheim apricot, grown in Brentwood since the 1920s, has been honored with a place on the Slow Food Ark of Taste. In July and August, peaches, nectarines, pluots and plums hang heavy on the trees. Brentwood's famous sweet corn, heirloom tomatoes, peppers, squash beans and other vegetables fresh from the fields are available at the many roadside stands throughout the summer months.

Harvest Time, a group of Brentwood u-pick farmers, publishes a farm trail map to help visitors locate more than 40 Brentwood farms with hundreds of acres of u-pick orchards and dozens of farm stands. Brentwood farmer Tom Bloomfield remembers working every summer as a kid on his dad's u-pick farm on Marsh Creek Road.

"When I was growing up, we grew 90 acres of u-pick tomatoes, pickling cucumbers, black eye peas, okra and beans," Bloomfield says. "People came from all around the Bay Area to pick crates of fruits and vegetable to 'put up' for the winter."

In 1976, Bloomfield's dad and four other farmers started Harvest Time. Bloomfield and his wife, Becky, still farm the Marsh Creek property. Their wine store, featuring Contra Costa wines, is listed on the Harvest Time map.

U-pick tips

When u-picking in Brentwood this summer, head out early avoid the midday heat. Wear sturdy shoes and hats, apply lots of sunscreen and bring lots of water.

Many farms have pruned their trees just for u-pick so that their visitors can reach the fruit laden branches without ladders. When you arrive at any stand, pick up the Harvest Time map showing all the other produce

stands and u-pick locations.

Celebrate the Brentwood u-pick tradition by coming out May 31 for a picnic lunch in an orchard. That afternoon, the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust will host "A Lunch in the Orchard" at the Maggiore Ranch on Camino Diablo Road. Held in the shade of the Maggiore's beautiful orchards, the event will include an old-fashioned picnic lunch. Proceeds from the lunch will benefit the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano Counties. To purchase tickets, visit [www.brentwoodaglandtrust.org](http://www.brentwoodaglandtrust.org) or [www.brownpapertickets/event/61443](http://www.brownpapertickets/event/61443).> To find out more about u-pick and farm stand hours, seasonal availability and events on farms, visit Harvest Time at [www.harvest4you.com](http://www.harvest4you.com).

Kathryn Lyddan is Executive Director of the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust (BALT) and Tom Powers is on the BALT board of directors and a farmer in Alhambra Valley. Reach them at [brentwoodagtrust@sbcglobal.net](mailto:brentwoodagtrust@sbcglobal.net).

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