

Quotes from
Food Fest! Your Complete Guide to Florida's Food Festivals
by Joan Steinbacher

Combining the excitement of celebrations with the fresh taste of local foods, Florida's food festivals continue those traditions today—typically honoring a crop grown or seafood harvested in the region.

From mullet to crawfish, frog legs to sausage, mangos to kumquats, garlic to swamp cabbage, flap jacks to chocolate, and anything and everything in between, there's a festival for every taste.

Florida's food festivals are ideal entertainment for the whole family. Besides the main attraction—delicious food—these festivals feature a variety of events.

Education abounds at the “Garlic University” during Delray Beach's Garlic Fest. Country music fills the sprawling festival grounds in daily concerts at the Plant City Strawberry Festival. Eating contests are popular, as well as off-beat competitions such as the “pig chase” at the Jay Peanut Festival or the “Tickle Pig” contest at the Pig on the Pond where participants decorate porta-potties.

The best places to find the heart and soul of tasty Florida fare is in the multitude of local food festivals held throughout the year in the state's pleasant and welcoming climate.

Festivals may feature a particular raw ingredient (like strawberries or tomatoes) while others involve preparing dishes onsite (like chili or barbecue). Or if you crave variety, “Taste Of” events typically feature the signature dishes of local restaurants.

The best thing about Florida's food festivals is that none of the rules your mother taught you apply. You can eat with your hands and put your elbows on the table, wipe your mouth on your sleeve, and lick your fingers before wiping them on your pants. It's no wonder people love food fests!

If you love seafood, but feel queasy on the waterways, Florida's seafood festivals are your Dramamine.

Try Florida's most popular fish—grouper. Floridians catch more than 90 percent of the nation's supply. Or if shellfish better suits your taste, shrimp, the top seafood harvested in Florida by dollar amount and weight, is plentiful.

Floridians don't fear the heat—not in our climate and not in our food. We love chili, barbecue, ribs, and—well, you get the picture.

If chili or barbecue isn't your thing, there's plenty other food festivals for carnivores. Try the frog leg festival. It's worth it just to say you went! But make sure you really try them—how else will you know if they taste like chicken?

The citrus industry is an integral part of Florida's economy. Each year Florida is the nation's top producer of citrus—oranges are the number one crop and most grapefruit distributed in the United States is grown in Florida.

Florida citrus varieties range from grapefruit, oranges, tangerines, tangelos (a cross between a tangerine and a grapefruit), mandarins, lemons, limes and kumquats. Kumquats are the smallest of the citrus fruits, with a thick edible rind. Oval ones tend to be sweet and oblong ones tart. Try them both, but definitely try the kumquat pie!

For health-conscious festival-goers, there's a cornucopia of festivals celebrating vegetables. The Swamp Cabbage festival honors the delicacy gourmets call the "Heart of Palm," the meat of the cabbage palm tree. The cabbage palm is actually the Sabal Palm, which is the official state tree of Florida. Like most vegetables, swamp cabbage is low in saturated fat and very low in cholesterol.

Have a healthy heart and pay tribute to the state's hardworking farmers by attending a veggie fest!

... come out of your beer stein and taste test some unique and different brews. Drink outside the beer bottle—and definitely outside the wine box!

Who among you hasn't wanted to skip the entrée on occasion and go straight to dessert? I don't have to tell you how I feel about the chocolate festival—yum, yum!

No matter what your favorite food is, "Taste Of" events are sure to please. Most have a wide assortment of local fare to satisfy varied palates.

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