

# *edible* EAST BAY<sup>®</sup>

## Tasting the California Foodscape

---

EAST BAY [edibleeastbay.com/2023/09/22/tasting-the-california-foodscape](https://edibleeastbay.com/2023/09/22/tasting-the-california-foodscape)

September 22, 2023

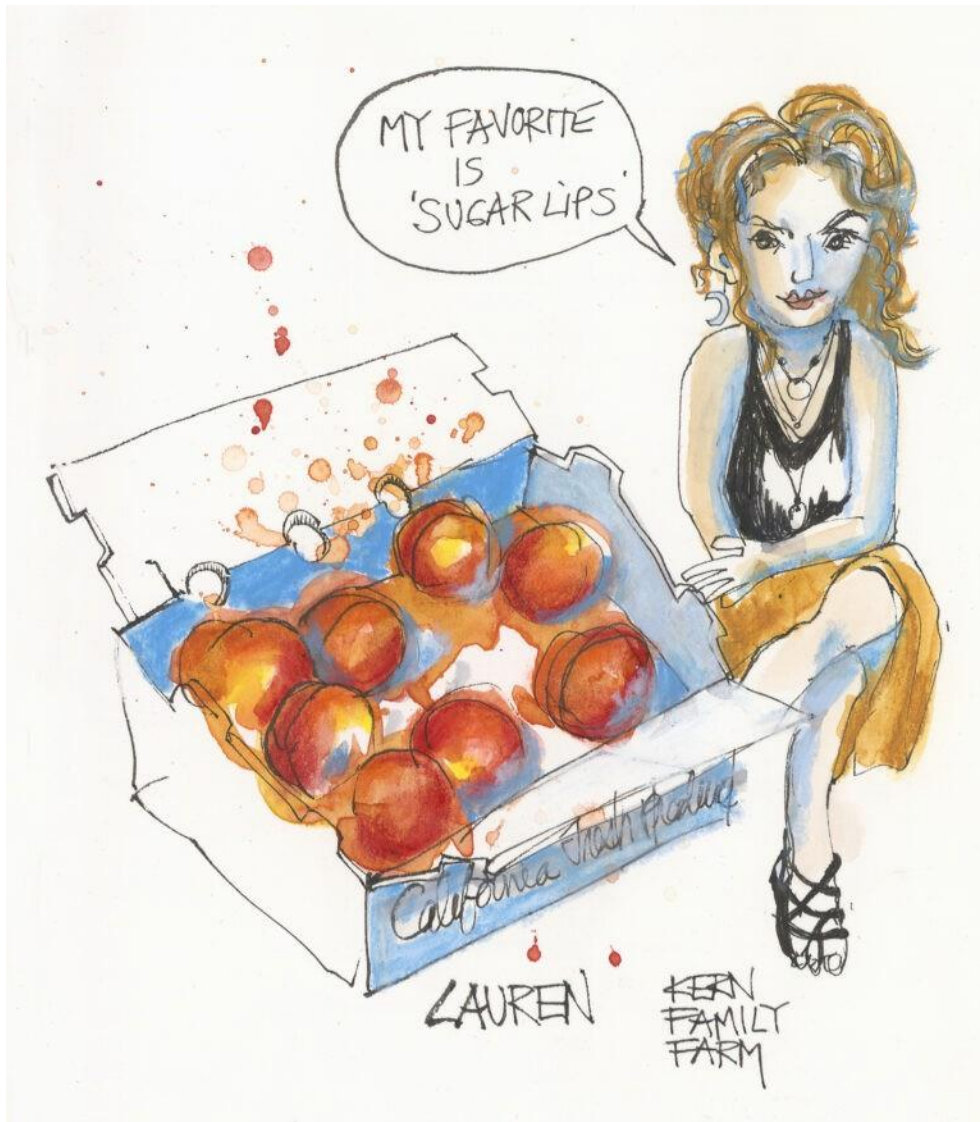


## A Fall Agritourism Guide

---

By Cheryl Angelina Koehler | Illustrations by Cathy Raingarden

---



As the throngs flew off to distant destinations in the notorious 2023 summer of revenge travel, artist Cathy Raingarden and I set out into California farm country. Our quest was to find some special spots where readers might have a good time tasting the fall harvest while picking, learning, shopping, or even spending the night. Skipping by acres of boring, chemical-ridden monocrops, we sought out farms that are actively responding to the climate crisis by adopting regenerative practices, and we found that many farmers taking such measures are eager to show off and talk about their work while offering tastes of the food in its freshest state.

***IMPORTANT: Information may change, and some farms require an appointment, so please, always check before you set out.***

## **What About Those Fall Peaches?**

---

A July visit to the morning side of Mount Diablo took us to **Urban Edge Farm** just as the Cecchini family's organic apricot orchard was ablaze in orange fruit. The apricots are now gone, but the farm's juicy u-pick peaches continue into September along with organic u-pick cherry tomatoes and flowers. Come back later in the season for u-pick pomegranates and persimmons, and stop in the farm store for lots of handmade products from nearby producers. *2017 Walnut Blvd, Brentwood. Open T–Su 8–6 (plus Labor Day) through Thanksgiving. (925) 634-4400.*



## Tomatoes Are Not Just for Summer

---

The scent of a tomato plant always sends me back to the first time I stood on little feet in the family garden eating a tomato hot off the vine. Every tomato I've eaten that way since is only second best, but I'm still excited by the idea of u-pick tomatoes.

At **Live Earth Farm**, the organic dry-farmed u-pick tomatoes may last well into fall, and depending on when you visit, you could pick apples, blackberries, peppers, or pumpkins as well. Reserve ahead on their website or just go pick from the farm stand and relax at a picnic table. The Farm Discovery program teaches about the farm's work toward achieving natural organic diversity. *1275 Green Valley Rd, Watsonville. U-pick by appt. Farm stand open weekends 10–3 thru Oct. (831) 763-2448.*

Woman-owned and -run **Sea to Sky Farm** has a one-day organic tomato u-pick and canning workshop scheduled for September 16 at the farm's sublime mountaintop-to-seaside location on Bonny Doon Road near Santa Cruz ([register here](#)). The farm also grows glass gem corn, a vibrant, rainbow-colored type of heritage flint corn that (once dried) can be popped as popcorn or ground into corn flour. *(831) 419-7773.*

There's a large slice of tomato heaven at **Smith Family Farm**. Jan Smith says people will drive all the way out to their far-eastern Contra Costa County farm in early summer, hop out and look for the piles of tomatoes, and if the beauties are not heaped up in full view, get back in the car and drive off. The good news is that once the tomato vines start to produce, they go on fruiting and ripening until the year turns dark and damp. At the Smith's Tomato Day,

September 23, you can sample dozens of tomatoes (plain or in chef-made dishes) and send the kids out to the pumpkin patch. 4350 Sellers Ave, Knightsen. Farm stand open daily 9–5. Check for fall u-pick. (925) 625-5966.



## Figs of Fall

---

The fig is a most generous tree. It gives its fruits (actually, flowers) twice: first on the old wood in spring and again on the new growth with a second, larger crop in fall. While working as a chef in Washington, DC, in my 20s, I foraged with impunity from a huge fig tree on the National Cathedral grounds and would continue such practice from the wild fig trees growing everywhere here in California, were it not for the birds and squirrels always getting to the ripe fruits first. Legitimate u-pick figs don't seem to be a thing in California, but please drop me a line if you find some.

## A Is for Apple

---



PINK PRINCESS



MACOUN



HUDSON'S GOLDEN GEM

Oakland resident Laura Cheever farms organic apples in Sebastopol. She says that the cold start to summer 2023 delayed her coveted **Laura's Apples** Gravenstein crop, so she may still have that early ripening variety through August. Her other varieties ripen through October. If you would like an invitation to Laura's Orchard Days, go to [lurasapples.square.site](http://lurasapples.square.site) and get on the mailing list. On a visit to this regenerative farm, you can see how carbon is being returned to the soil, and you may get to spy on the wild quail and bobcat.

Farmer Brooke Hazen has been so bitten by the pleasures of heirloom apples that he's planted over 70 varieties at his **Gold Ridge Organic Farms**. At the farm's **Heirloom Apple Celebration on September 16**, you'll get to taste quite a few of those apples as well as the farm's organic extra virgin olive oils and many other locally made treats. On a visit last December, we peered from the tasting room/farm shop into the milling room as the vivid green olive oil was pouring out of the mill spout. Farmer Hazen tilted his nose toward the flow and leapt into the air with joy at the beautiful aroma. Out on the patio, surrounded by old olive trees, we easily imagined we were in Tuscany as we took in 360° views of the orchards and West Sonoma County landscape while tasting the olive oils with dried apples, local cheeses, and the farm's splendid apple syrup. *3387 Canfield Rd, Sebastopol. Open F–S 10–4 by appt. (707) 823-3110.*

You can taste dozens of heirloom apple varieties on a fall tour at **Birdsong Orchards** in Watsonville. Farmer Nadine Schaffer loves to share her knowledge of regenerative practices, and she also welcomes volunteers who want to get knee-deep in learning. You can add an option to pick your own roses after a tour, but if you want to pick apples, Nadine will send you around the corner to the old **Gizdich Ranch** at 55 Peckham Rd, Watsonville, where the pie shop is open daily 9–5. “They have the best pie, go get some pie, really you need to. You pick berries sometimes, too,” Schaffer says on her website's local travel guide.

The name **Chileno Valley Ranch** might ring a bell for grass-fed beef and lamb, but this diversified farm also has fields of flowers and vegetables as well as orchards filled with organic heritage apples available for u-pick by reservation into October. What makes the ranch especially remarkable is the restoration work that owners Mike and Sally Gale have done to the historic buildings and fences as well as the water systems, creeks, and native woodlands. You can listen to Peter Coyote telling about it on a video posted on the farm's website, but we think you should go see for yourself. *5105 Chileno Valley Rd, Petaluma*

Stroll through the **Historic Gentlemen's Orchard at Filoli Estate** on Orchard Days (weekends September 23–October 29) and you'll see over 600 apple, pear, plum, apricot, walnut, fig, and quince trees, including many rare and historically significant varieties. You can't pick the fruit, but the shop and café offer many ways to taste. *86 Cañada Rd, Woodside. Open daily 10–5. (650) 364-8300.*

On our annual Thanksgiving trek through Mendocino's Anderson Valley, we always stop at the **Philo Apple Farm**'s self-serve farm stand. In the quiet of the big old wooden shed, we'll taste as many as two dozen heirloom apple varieties, all labeled with their backstories, before we choose our favorites; weigh them on the old scale; add some hard cider or apple juice, apple syrup, apple butter, jams, and a handful of other products; and stuff our dollars through a slot. We have never met anyone but the family dog at the stand, but we understand that the Schmitt family welcomes visitors with their Stay and Cook weekends,

Sunday Suppers, and live/work program for budding young farmers wanting to learn how the farm strives toward biodynamic balance here along the fertile Navarro River bottom. *18501 Philo Greenwood Rd, Philo Self-serve farm stand open daily 9–6 (10–5 after time change).*

## **Lost in the Pumpkin Patch?**

---

You're more likely to get lost in a corn maze on the way to October's many u-pick pumpkin patches, and you may have to flee from kids in spooky costumes, but Halloween is an easy excuse to get out on a farm. Here are a few suggestions:

**Three Nunns Farm** has 40+ pumpkin varieties on their gorgeous golden acres, and their corn maze is legendary. You'll need to go online to make a reservation. *550 Walnut Blvd, Brentwood.*

Find dozens of heirloom pumpkin varieties along with cut flowers, herbs, and weekend workshops at the **Earthbound Farm Stand**. *7250 Carmel Valley Rd, Carmel-By-The-Sea. Open daily 8–6. Check online for pumpkin patch dates.*

If you're rumbling down Highway 1, pull up at **Rodoni Farms**'s famous "U Pick 'Em" pumpkin patch. *4444 CA-1, Santa Cruz. Sept. 23–Oct. 31, daily 9–6. (831) 234-9354.*

For pumpkins from a diversified organic farm known for prioritizing its workers' well-being, visit **Blue House Farm**. They also grow popcorn. *950 La Honda Rd, San Gregorio. Farmstand open weekends 12–5.*



## October's Jewels

---

Pomegranate trees abound at **Tres Sabores**, one of Napa Valley's first certified organic wine vineyards. Winemaker Julie Johnson's farm is the largest grower of exotic pomegranate varieties in the area, and you'll get to taste quite a few of those varieties with a reservation for her annual **Pomegranate & Paella Harvest Party, this year on October 14**. Johnson says her "why" for growing pomegranates has to do with "the bees and hummingbirds ... connecting the dots to diversity in landscape." 1620 S Whitehall Ln, St Helena. (707) 967-8027.

U-pick pomegranates are an October favorite at **Smith Family Farm**. Farmer Jan Smith loves the trees' adaptability, and she doesn't worry about them when she sends people into the pomegranate orchard to pick. "They have spines, so nobody hurts a pomegranate tree," she says. 4350 Sellers Ave, Knightsen. Farm stand open daily 9-5. (925) 625-5966.





## Yikes! More Spikes!

---

California produces a phenomenal percentage of the world's nuts, but chestnuts seem to be the only kind visitors can go pick. *Edible Silicon Valley* publisher Catherine Nunes clarifies that at **Skyline Chestnuts Orchard** you don't actually pick the spiky-hulled nuts from the trees; you put on gloves, pick up the fallen fruit from the ground, and carefully pop the nuts out of the hulls. Back home, you still have to roast (or boil) the nuts and pull off the inner shells, but that's what a cool and rainy late day of fall is perfect for. 22322 Skyline Blvd, La Honda. U-Pick by appt. starting mid-October. (408) 202-9557.

## Follow the Gold

---

Longtime readers know about my passion for California's extraordinary extra virgin olive oils and how I can't stand the thought of anyone passing up the chance to taste those bright, grassy, pungent flavors during the fall and winter harvest. An increasing number of olive growers are setting up their own mills with tasting rooms, so you can easily follow several branching tasting trails down through the state.



Up near Clear Lake are two olive mill/winery combos with tasting opportunities:

At **Terra Sávia**, the olive mill and tasting bar are open Friday through Sunday 11–5 and Monday through Thursday by appointment. *14160 Mountain House Rd, Hopland. (707) 744-1114.* **Chacewater Winery & Olive Mill** is open for tasting daily 11–5. *5625 Gaddy Ln, Kelseyville. (707) 279-2995.* There's also a splendid daylong harvest event that San Francisco's **Olive This Olive That** company holds at their mill site in Cloverdale, probably in November. If you [sign up for our newsletter](#), we'll alert you when the event gets scheduled.

North Bay Wine Country offers a string of appealing tasting stops:

**Grove 45** offers olive oil tasting by appointment Sunday through Thursday 10–5 and Friday and Saturday 10–6. *965 Silverado Trail N, Calistoga, (707) 360-2440.* By appointment, you can taste olive oil daily 10–3 at **Tres Sabores** winery. *1620 S Whitehall Ln, St Helena. (707) 967-8027.* **Round Pond Estate** offers olive oil tasting Wednesday through Sunday by appointment. *875 Rutherford Rd, Rutherford. (707) 302-2575.* The shop at **The Olive Press** is open Monday through Friday 11–5 and Saturday and Sunday 10–5:30 with olive oil tasting

by appointment. 24724 Arnold Dr, Sonoma. (707) 939-8900. You can stroll the grounds daily 11–5 at **McEvoy Ranch** and sign up for tours and tastings. 5935 Red Hill Rd, Petaluma). (707) 778- 2307.

Heading eastward into the Capay Valley, stop in any Wednesday through Sunday 11–5 to taste olive oil and tour the mill at **Séka Hills**. Inside the tasting room, shop, and deli, the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation also sells their wine, beef, honey, nuts, and other products. 19326 County Road 78, Brooks. (530) 796-2810.

In Winters, you can taste the extraordinary **Bondolio** olive oils by appointment at the Bond family's farm and mill. 9352 Campbell Rd, Winters. (916) 715-9007. Heading through rural Fairfield, watch for the organic olive orchards as you near **Il Fiorello Olive Oil Co.**, where they have many tasting, learning, and touring experiences available during the October-through-December milling season. Open daily 11–5 at 2625 Mankas Corner Rd, Fairfield (707) 864-1529.

The **UC Davis Olive Center** is an important resource for olive research, from growing to milling, blending, and sensory evaluation. At the campus store, you can purchase the Center's extra virgin olive oil made from campus-grown olives, and if you sign up for *Edible East Bay's* e-newsletter, we'll let you know about the Center's annual Olio Nuovo Festival, (usually in December).

In the East Bay, the Crohare family invites the public for a mill tour and tasting every third Sunday of the month, 12–4:30, at the historic **Olivina** estate. 4555 Arroyo Rd, Livermore. Over in Lodi, you can taste the Coldani Olive Ranch olive oils daily 10–5 at the **Calivirgin Winery & Olive Mill**. 13950 Thornton Rd, Lodi. (209) 210-3162.

**Want to try picking and curing olives?** You can make reservations to do just that on Saturday mornings in November at **Dos Aguilas Olive Orchard** (1855 Pleasant Valley Rd, Aptos).

If you're going to be in the San Joaquin Valley, check with **Enzo Olive Oil Co.** for options to join a mill tour or mill-to-table dinner. 7770 Rd 33, Madera. (559) 299-0203 X133. With advance planning, you can visit **Olivaia** in Lindsay to taste their extraordinary Ola olive oil and go for a walk in their antique olive orchards. (310) 291-4074.

On the Central Coast, you have three chances to taste and tour:

The tasting room at **Kiler Ridge Olive Farm** is open Thursday through Monday 11–5 and they offer two different tours on Friday and Saturday. 1111 Kiler Canyon Rd, Paso Robles. (805) 400 -1439. **Pasolivo Ranch** is open daily 11–5 for tasting. 8530 Vineyard Dr, Paso Robles. (805) 227-0186. **43 Ranch** has a tasting room at their olive mill that is open Friday 3–5 and weekends 12–4 or by appointment. 65340 Los Lobos Rd, San Ardo. (831) 627-2455.

If you're down near San Diego, make an appointment to tour the **Temecula Olive Ranch**, one of the oldest commercial olive farms in the state. Outstanding in the Field, the dining experience company known for their romantic settings with astoundingly long outdoor tables, is holding one of their events at the ranch on October 24. 46780 CA-371, Aguanga. (866) 654-8396.

Visit **Olive Oil Heaven** for more ideas for touring during the olive harvest season. You'll also find lots of great recipes for enjoying that golden-green elixir.



## A Treasure of November

---

It was the chance to visit a third-generation Japanese heritage farm that took us to the western shore of Folsom Lake. At **Otow Orchard**, Chris Otow Kuratomi and her husband, Tosh Kuratomi, grow a large array of fruits, nuts, and row crops, but they are renowned for preserving the Japanese art of hoshigaki (dried persimmons), which they sell by mail order and at their farm stand alongside their own and neighbors' produce. As we conversed with Tosh, a photographer showed up to gather evidence the insurance company needed to justify revocation of the farm's fire coverage. Tosh was stoic, even about how many trees they lost during the drought-period water restrictions of 2021. He suspects they'll keep farming and making hoshigaki for another decade. *Farm stand open at 6232 Eureka Rd, Granite Bay Tuesday through Saturday 10–6 and Sunday 11–5. (916) 791-1656.*



SAFFRON  
THREADS

## California Saffron

---

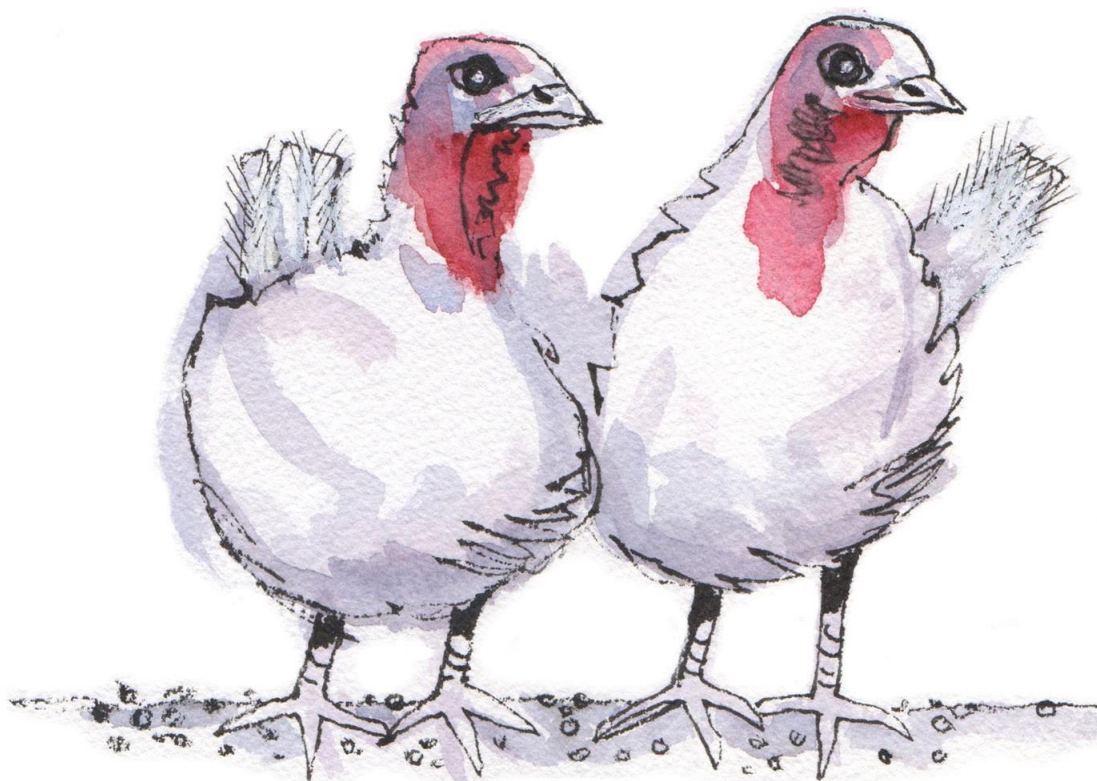
When the saffron crocuses bloom in late fall at **Peace & Plenty Farm** it's best to steer clear of the intensive harvest action, but you can purchase saffron, saffron lemonade, and many other farm-crafted saffron products daily at the farm stand. You can also book a stay at the farm and go around to visit the local wineries. *4550 Soda Bay Rd, Kelseyville.*

## Talking Turkey

---

Did you know that you can order a pasture-raised **Diestel Ranch** turkey and pick it up at the company's Sierra Foothills ranch in Sonora? Operating since 1949, Diestel is known for its sustainable practices. You can see and photograph the animals on your turkey-pick-up visit and also shop for more holiday goodies. *22200 Lyons Bald Mountain Rd, Sonora. For turkey pick-up on the ranch, call (209) 532-4950.*

Deborah Lührman, publisher of *Edible Monterey Bay*, calls the turkeys from **Paicines Ranch** "the best you've ever had." In addition to their usual Saturday-before-Thanksgiving turkey-pick-up event, the ranch is hosting an October 28 Fall Field Tour followed by a Farm-to-Table Dinner at their dining hall overlooking the riparian corridor, bluffs, and oak-studded hills. This 5,000-acre regenerative farm and education center also offers pasture-raised lamb and farm stays. *13388 Airline Hwy, Paicines. (831) 628-0288.*



## Where the Crops Are Education and Equity

---

Every Saturday morning from 8 to 10, the gates are flung open to the public at **Soil Born Farms**, an urban food security project and education center along the American River east of Sacramento. You can shop for fresh produce and other farm products, eat at the on-site café, attend classes (for all ages), or go on a farm tour or bird walk. Whatever you close to do, there are ample opportunities to learn about the farm's ecology, sustainable ag practices, and work to support the local community. *2140 Chase Dr, Rancho Cordova.*

Stop in at **Pie Ranch** 12–5 any day except Tuesday and you'll find the farm stand and pie shop open. Spend a little extra time there and you're sure to learn about how this Food Justice Certified Farm lives its vision for farming in an equitable society. You might like to attend their September 23 Joy Jam Celebration of Solidarity for the Future of Food. *2080 CA Hwy 1 at Green Oaks Way, Pescadero.*

Saturday is Open Farm Day at **City Slicker Farms**. Between 11 and 6, you can take a self-guided tour and learn how this nonprofit is growing food justice as part of its sustainable agriculture practices. *2847 Peralta St, Oakland. (510) 763-4241.*

The best way to visit and learn first-hand about how **Gill Tract Community Farm** (a community organization and UC Berkeley partnership) promotes social justice, agroecology, organic produce, and equitable food access is to go volunteer. *1050 San Pablo Ave, Albany.*

**Bon Voyage!**

---

***Important:*** All information in this guide is subject to change, so please check for current open hours and conditions and whether you need a reservation before setting out!

**Subscribe to our newsletter** and you'll have free, ongoing access to our **Tasting the California Foodscape Directory**, an interactive pdf compendium to this guide that gives you all those practical details in a format you can carry on your phone or print out to stuff inside this magazine. The newsletter will also alert you to **newly announced on-farm events** to add to your itinerary.