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Greatest Meals in the Green Mountain State

A leader in the farm-to-table movement, Vermont treasures its agricultural heritage and working landscape. From maple sugarhouses to hillsides dotted with black-and-white cows, the state is full of foods that are raised, crafted, caught and foraged locally. Iconic food and drink includes classic New England recipes with nods to the native Abenaki people and to Quebec up north. At the same time, a new generation of chefs has become known for fresh takes on traditional ingredients like heirloom cornmeal, venison and fiddlehead ferns.

Ramps

Among the earliest edible greens to sprout through the frosty Vermont soil are ramps, or wild leeks. They are as eagerly anticipated by chefs today as they were welcomed by native Abenaki. Resembling scallions with an increasingly pungent bite as they mature, ramps are suited to various spring preparations, including pickling and grilling. On restaurant menus, they might punctuate a dish like the braised oxtail-stuffed squid with spring radishes and grilled ramp aioli served at the James Beard Foundation Award-nominated [SoLo Farm and Table](#) in South Londonderry, or you might find them starring in the ramp and potato soup with ramp dumplings at Ariel's Restaurant in Brookfield.

Heirloom Apples

Vermont's state fruit is deeply rooted back to when every homestead had a few trees. [Scott Farm](#) in Dummerston is known for its diversity of heirloom apples, including Thomas Jefferson's two favorite varieties, Esopus Spitzenberg and Maiden's Blush, which are particularly suited to drying. Every fall, the orchard hosts an heirloom apple dinner featuring dishes like rabbit stuffed with Baldwin apples, bacon and chard. The James Beard-nominated team at Kitchen Table Bistro in Richmond showcases heirloom apples on the fall menu in preparations like slow-roasted rack of pork with squash risotto and apple relish, as well as Grandmother's Apple Cake with brown sugar apples.

Gilfeather Turnip

Recently named the Vermont state vegetable, this heirloom turnip variety is sweeter than most (likely due to some rutabaga influence in its ancestral line), and the town of Wardsboro honors the humble root with a whole festival every October. There you can fill up a tray with everything from Gilfeather turnip soup to surprisingly good doughnuts made with turnip. Seasonally, the [Four Columns Inn](#) in nearby Newfane features Gilfeathers in the form of a velvety bisque or maybe in a rich gratin layered with Grafton Cheddar and local heavy cream.

Maple Baked Beans

For a true Vermont experience, head to the town of Georgia where the J sisters (June, Jolly and Jerrilyn) have been baking Vermont yellow eye beans with the family's own maple syrup, slab bacon and yellow mustard for more than 50 years. Every week, they sell up to 16 pounds from the deli and freezer at their [Center Market](#), greeting most customers by name. For maple baked beans with table service, try the Chelsea Royal Diner in West Brattleboro, where diner classics get a fresh, locavore twist and the beans feature local syrup and their own diner-raised pork.

Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream

Founded in 1978 in an old Burlington gas station, [Ben & Jerry's](#) grew into Vermont's most-famous food brand after Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield first mixed big chunks of candy and cookies into their own ice cream. The company is now owned by Unilever but stays firmly rooted in Vermont. Flavors like Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough and Cherry Garcia are legendary, and the Waterbury factory tour is the state's No. 1 tourist attraction. If you dare, order the Vermonster sundae, made with 20 scoops of ice cream, fudge brownies, bananas, cookies, choice of toppings, hot fudge, whipped cream and marshmallows.

Heirloom Corn

Sweet, fresh-picked corn gets all the glory, but it was corn cultivated for drying that sustained the native Abenaki people who first settled in the region we now call Vermont. Old heirloom varieties like one called Calais Flint Corn, saved by farmers Roy and Ruth Fair of North Calais, have made a resurgence. Vermont cornmeal shows up on restaurant menus throughout the state, including [Black Krim Tavern's jalapeno cornbread](#) with pickled sweet peppers and pork belly, made with corn raised and milled in Randolph, the same town as the restaurant.

Lamb

Most people associate Vermont with cows, but in the 1800s the hillsides were dominated by sheep, raised largely for wool, and Vermonters still eat more lamb per capita than most Americans. The beautiful restaurant overlooking Quechee's covered bridge at Simon Pearce's glass and pottery workshop offers a fine local lamb burger served with a mint and Vermont feta salad. At Shelburne Farms, the striking National Historic Landmark and home to a working farm and environmental education nonprofit, [the seasonal restaurant](#) features lamb raised on-site in dishes like slow-roasted lamb shanks with chive blossom gremolata.

Craft Beer

Historically, Vermonters made sap beer using maple tree sap — now brewed seasonally by Fiddlehead Brewing and Lawson's Finest Liquids — but, more recently, the state has built a global reputation for craft beer. Beer pilgrims flock to Hill Farmstead Brewery in Greensboro and [The Alchemist](#), brewer of fabled Heady Topper, along with dozens of others bubbling up around the state. For beer-influenced eats like rich Cheddar and lager soup or beer-marinated steak along with house brews, try the Trapp Family Lodge Bierhall on the picturesque Stowe property, founded in 1950 by the von Trapps (of The Sound of Music) and still run by the family.

Spring-Dug Parsnips

Before supermarkets stocked tomatoes year-round, Vermonters endured months of limp root-celared vegetables until the ground thawed enough to unearth cold-sweetened, crisp spring-dug parsnips. "When the snow melted and people began to dig parsnips ... let freedom ring!" wrote Louise Andrews Kent (aka Mrs. Appleyard), an authority on Vermont cooking. Chefs around the state take advantage of this sweetness in creative ways. At [The Downtown Grocery](#) in Ludlow, spring-dug parsnips might be used to both flavor a milky broth and add earthy crunch as garnish for handmade lobster ravioli with spring peas and house-grown pea greens.

Cider, Hard and Sweet

Before Prohibition, hard cider was the beverage of choice, a way to preserve fresh cider and safer to drink than water. Many orchards like Dwight Miller Orchards in Dummerston press their own sweet cider, but hard cider has also staged a comeback. There is also ice cider, fermented from frozen cider into a sweet-tart dessert wine. The Northeast Kingdom Tasting Center is home to [Newport Ciderhouse Bar and Grill](#) and to Eden Specialty Ciders' hard cidery and tasting bar. Along with hard ciders on tap, menu specials might include apple and shallot-cruste steak with a cider-whiskey sauce, as well as spiced apple cheesecake with cider-bourbon salted caramel.