

How to Get Started with Pick-Your-Own

Pick-Your-Own adds value to your crops

A pick-your-own (PYO or U-pick) operation is a direct marketing channel where customers harvest fruits, vegetables, flowers, or trees on their own.

Like any marketing channel, a PYO has advantages and disadvantages.



Advantages of Pick-Your-Own Experiences:

- Reduced labor for harvesting
- Opportunity to sell additional products
- Your farm can become a community gathering space
- Opportunity to get to know your customers
- Opportunity to educate customers about crop varieties and production methods
- Fewer post-harvest handling tasks (e.g., sorting, storage, packing)
- Reduced packaging costs when customers bring their own
- Higher profit margins and reduced need for distributors
- Greater market recognition

Disadvantages of Pick-Your-Own Experiences:

- Risk exposure (food safety and accidents)
- Long hours
- Advertising costs may change in order to get customers to farm
- Customers might increase crop loss through waste and spoilage
- Unpredictable market
- Possibility of challenging customers
- Poor weather might deter visitation during critical harvest times
- Need crew for post-PYO clean up (to pick up spoiled crop to minimize disease and increase customer satisfaction)

Should you start a pick-your-own business?

PYO is wonderful if and only if you have the energy to manage it. Many people view running a PYO as an easy option, where free laborers harvest and the farmer sits back to relax. In fact, it might be harder to run a PYO operation than to harvest for wholesale or for a farmers' market. The farm is continually exposed, your work-flow is constantly interrupted, you have daily guest management, and you need a labor force to clean up after the PYO customers and harvest ahead of rainy periods.

What crops are good for pick-your-own?

Deciding what crops to offer is a big decision. When planning:

- Consider workload and business goals when choosing PYO crops.
- Start small and balance with existing commitments.
- Assess competition and customer preferences.
- Offering a full season is demanding, be realistic about your capacity.



How should I layout my property for PYO?

Your farm must be inviting and welcoming to all because everyone is your guest at a PYO operation. Create a naturally friendly environment that is safe, has clean bathrooms and sinks, plenty of shade, seating, and fun.



Remember that you are creating a destination, and therefore you need to design the feel and look of the property to accommodate guests and facilitate your interactions with them.

An effective layout will create a clear, straightforward experience for customers and farmers. This can be challenging to balance with efficient production and land use. Many perennial pick-your-own crops take a long time to establish, so carefully plan their placement to avoid having to move them later. Annual crops are more flexible; the spring strawberry patch could be next year's pumpkin patch, for example.