



Three Outdoor Markets in Rhode Island Worth Checking Out this Summer

These local outdoor marketplaces host several different vendors and businesses, showcasing a variety of skills and flavors.

June 10, 2022



The Schoolyard Market at Hope and Main in Warren features new businesses in the food scene. Photography by Carol Wild Photography.

It's time to 'flea' to this summer's outdoor markets, which offer up a variety of freshly grown produce, locally made foods and sourced vintage clothing, art and furniture. Grab an iced coffee and a pastry, then show local artisans and food vendors some community love.

NORTH

Providence Flea, *Providence*

Sundays from June-September

Along the Providence River on Sundays is the place to shop for impressive flea finds — and food truck grub — to bring home art, vintage goods and furniture, jewelry and more.

"We are not a traditional flea market," says Maria Tocco, owner and market manager of the Providence Flea, which launched in 2013. Since its inception, the flea has hosted more than 2,000 vendors, consisting of carefully selected businesses that sell mostly homemade and handcrafted wares as well as preloved and upcycled merch.

This summer marks the tenth outdoor season of the Providence Flea, which was inspired by the Brooklyn Flea in New York City. After several visits over several years, Tocco enamored by its community and placemaking — whipped up plans to create something Providence didn't know it needed.



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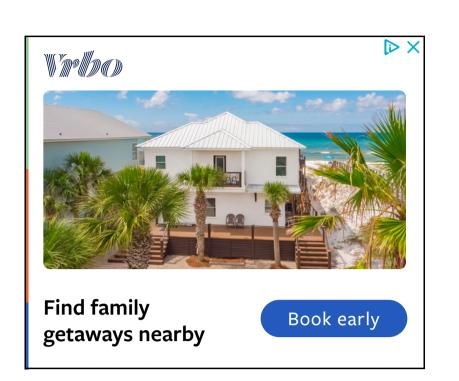
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"We now host about seventy-five vendors each week, year-round," says Tocco, who assigns each vendor a site and arrival time. The PVD Flea hosted approximately 350 vendors during the winter/spring season at Farm Fresh RI, including the food trucks that help replenish shoppers during their visit.

As Tocco got the wheels turning for Providence Flea, she was also working as communications director for the lieutenant governor's office. She was later hired by HealthSource RI, the state-based health exchange, and promoted to deputy director of communications, advertising and outreach. Once Providence Flea's popularity picked up, Tocco's wife encouraged her to turn it into a full-time endeavor.

A decade later, Tocco reflects on the work she and her wife have put into the business venture.

"It's been a feat, especially with the fact that we were able to operate during COVID besides being shut down for five months in 2020," Tocco says. "The fact that we could keep it going and growing is something that I'm really proud of."

Why is it not your typical flea market, you ask? "It's vintage, artisans and independent makers; everything has to be either handmade, small-batch or vintage," says Tocco, ensuring that shoppers won't find anything mass-produced. The Flea also features vendors from other New England states like Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont, and even a couple from New York.



Courtesy of Providence Flea

For the past ten seasons of Providence Flea, shoppers have gotten familiar with the small businesses of the state, and what Tocco enjoys seeing the most on Sundays is the community the Flea has built among vendors and their followers.

"People come here as a gathering spot to support local vendors and small businesses, meet up [with friends] to shop together, eat together, hang out, see what's new and to visit their favorite vendors or to see the featured vendors in our newsletters," Tocco says.

On June 5 through Sept. 25, take a stroll down South Water Street on Sundays from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Sign up for the newsletter for event updates and market highlights on the website and follow the Flea on social media @providenceflea. 275 S. Water St., Providence, 484-7783, providenceflea.com

SOUTH

Casey Farm Market, Saunderstown

Saturdays from May–October

During a normal year, Casey Farm in Saunderstown sees about 50,000 visitors. Besides the summer camps and programs for children, creative workshops and private functions in the garden, its farmers market drives a lot of the traffic — the markets are a popular summer affair, featuring several vendors and businesses from around the state.

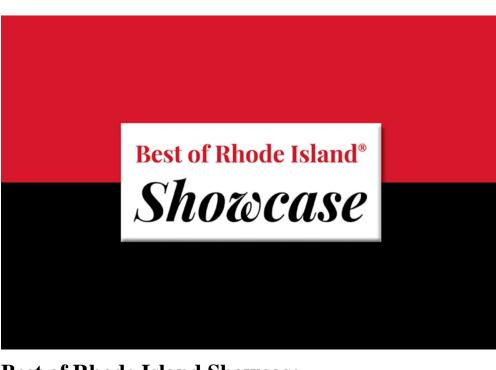
The Casey Farm Market operates rain or shine on the farm's front lawn. "We're hearty New England folk here — bring an umbrella," says Marissa Dufault, the festival and retail coordinator of Historic New England and market manager for the Casey Farm Market.



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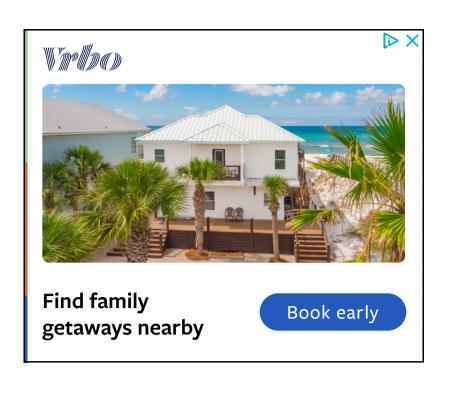


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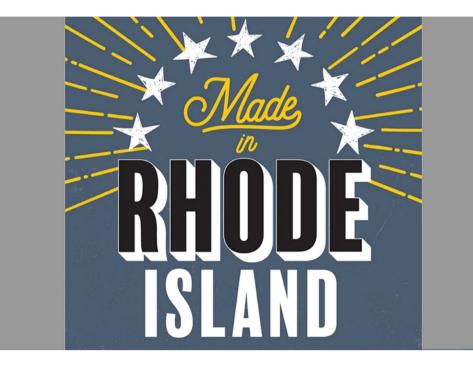
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In the spring of 2002, Mike and Polly Hutchison created the Coastal Growers Market (now Casey Farm Market) with the help of local farmers and vendors. They were live-in farm managers in the early nineties, in charge of tending to the property. In 1994, they converted the space into an organic farm, offering the first USDA-certified organic Community Supported Agriculture shares in Rhode Island. Today, the CSA provides more than 150 families with weekly produce.

The CSA's success left the pair with excess produce. Through their connections, they found people who sourced local shellfish, made baked goods, art and more. They created the farmers market to support local vendors and farmers while encouraging visitors from all over to follow suit.

"I work at mostly every market and the quality of the products is just so wonderful," says Jane Hennedy, site manager for southern Rhode Island at Historic New England. "Even during COVID times, it still feels like a community. That's what Casey Farm is all about — being a community center."

Vendors such as Barden Family Orchard, Pat's Pastured and Lazy K Ranch are all market regulars. You can grab a coffee and some baked goods from bakeries like Seven Stars Bakery and Provencal Bakery as you shop.

"When you're buying from a local farm, there's that sense of you're buying from somebody who treats their animals properly, and that's very important in the food world." — Marissa Dufault

Local farmers markets such as this one, where everything must be grown or produced in Rhode Island, have plenty of benefits for the community, Dufault says. They support the local economy and give shoppers peace of mind, knowing where their products come from.



The Casey Farm Market features only locally grown produce. Courtesy of Historic New England / Casey Farm

"When you buy meat and produce that come from large corporations, the care and treatment of animals isn't always what it should be," says Dufault. "When you're buying from a local farm, there's that sense of you're buying from somebody who treats their animals properly, and that's very important in the food world."

Casey Farm is holding a Juneteenth celebration June 19 from noon to 4 p.m., along with the RI Slave History Medallion Project and the Narrow River Preservation Association. Explore the grounds via hayride or on foot, listen to music by the URI African Drummers and Dancers, the Nettukkusqk Singers, Sidy Maiga and Afrimanding and enjoy other festivities. At 2 p.m., the Casey Farm crew will unveil a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion. Bring lawn chairs or blankets to munch on lunch from local BIPOC-owned food trucks.

Gather your produce, meats, breads and more at the Casey Farm Market through Oct. 29, rain or shine, on Saturdays from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Visit the website or Facebook page for updates. 2325 Boston Neck Rd., Saunderstown, 295-1030, historicnewengland.org/casey-farm

EAST

Schoolyard Market, Warren

Wednesdays from June-September

When Lisa Raiola came up with the idea to start a food incubator, she had never heard of the concept, she just knew she had a passion for food.

During the recession of 2009, Raiola fell in love with an 18,000-square-foot school building for sale in Warren. She was looking for a space to start her own business, one that would also strengthen the local food economy.

And so Hope and Main, the state's first food incubator, was born.

"A food business is many times a path to economic mobility for a family and creates vibrancy in a local community; they create ownership and that's important because it's part of the idea that the local food economy really stands on the shoulders of small food businesses," says Raiola, Hope and Main's president.

Once a recipe is turned into a consistent product, the next step is to make the product a business, and help it stand out against other products. Hope and Main's objective is to move the vendors through those stages.

Hope and Main has launched 450 companies since 2014, and businesses like Feast and Fettle and Backyard Food Company are just two of the many graduates that started off with a dream then worked to make that dream a reality.



A friendly vendor at Schoolyard Market. Photography by Carol Wild Photography.

"That's why our incubator works," Raiola says. "We're helping people to incubate, hatch and launch new life and new ideas into the marketplaces, and it's a gratifying thing to do."

The Schoolyard Market features between twenty-five to thirty-five vendors stationed in tents outside the school. While one or two of the vendors may be farmers and artisans, the rest are all new makers in the local food scene so that guests can sample their products and discover new talent alongside food trucks and a weekly craft cocktail trailer.

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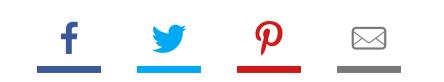
Farmers markets are the most direct way to sell and get feedback on products, Raiola says. "We want the maker to meet the eater as soon as possible in the process," she says. "We've recommended some of our makers to crowdsource their recipe through the course of the season by testing out recipes to see what people like, then finalize the product. That way people feel like they were part of making that product successful."

"To be on Main Street is to have a conversation with the community about how what you eat impacts the quality of your life and why it's important to know where your food comes from," says Raiola. "You don't learn that from reading the labels on products in the supermarket, you learn it by engaging at our markets."

Hope and Main also works with Samuel Adams Brewery for the "Brewing the American Dream" pitch contest, taking place Aug. 24. Guests help vote for their favorite vendor by sampling each contestant's product before the live judging, then one of the final two contestants will be announced as the winner at the Schoolyard Twilight Party on Sept. 10.

Check out and experience different brands and flavors at the Schoolyard Market from June 15–Sept. 28 on Wednesdays from 4–7 p.m. 691 Main St., Warren, 245–7400, makefoodyourbusiness.org

Tags: Casey Farm Market, Outdoor Markets, Providence, providence flea, saunderstown, schoolyard market, warren



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