

Showing what we're growing in sunny Yuma

Because most people think of Arizona as a big, dusty desert, they are surprised to learn that agriculture is Yuma County's number one industry (\$3.2 billion annually) – and that Yuma is the winter vegetable capital of the world. Dig deeper, and you'll find a whole new crop of fascinating farm-based experiences sprouting under our sunny skies. Bon appetit!

Dates, peanuts, treats and tours

Dates are one of the oldest tree crops in the world, dating back more than 5,000 years. Medjool dates, which originated in Morocco, were introduced here in 1944, and Yuma's now the world's largest producer of this superpremium variety. Three local date producers offer free tours of their groves; all have retail stores full of treats, including date shakes. The Peanut Patch traces its origins to Yuma homesteaders who introduced peanuts as a Yuma crop; it's still a favorite shopping stop for fresh peanuts, peanut brittle, fudge and more. Free kitchen tours with advance notice. Distances from vary (one date retail outlet is downtown). Allow one to two hours for each tour, including shopping.

Farm tours

"Field to Feast" farm tours are being offered to the public on selected days in 2011. We'll offer a special version for your group or put together your own custom tour ... how about dining in a date grove? The standard "Field to Feast" tours start with a food safety lesson, then participants gather their own veggies from our very own fields. While they enjoy a narrated tour of the fields, the produce they picked is transformed into a delicious lunch. Locations vary, allow ½ day.

Pick your own fruit

At Silva Farms, you can pick your own fruit: blackberries, peaches, tangelos, or apples, depending on the season. Something is usually ripe for the picking in January, February, March, May and June. Thirty minutes from Interstate 8, there's no charge to visit, just purchase the fruit you pick by the basket or pound. Allow one hour.

Yuma Lettuce Days

This annual festival celebrating Yuma's booming agriculture industry will take place March 11-13, 2011, following a regional ag industry conference. The culinary component for the festival will be vastly expanded, with celebrity chefs, demonstrations, food and beverage tastings and more. Just off the interstate, \$3 group rate. Allow one hour to ½ day.

Garden tours

Gardening in the desert is both a pleasure and a challenge. To see how locals make the desert bloom, stroll through one of our public gardens. Planted with help from the University of Arizona and the City of Yuma, the Robert J. Moody Demonstration Garden serves as a "living library" to show what can thrive in our desert climes. The Yuma Conservation Garden features native Sonoran Desert plants, a duck pond, antique farm machinery, desert tortoises and a botanical garden. Both are about fifteen minutes from interstate, and offer free admission (donations welcome). Allow one hour.