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SOUPS

MAKING THE PERFECT SOUP BALANCES TWO COMPETING GOALS: CREATING FLAVORS THAT COMFORT AND CREATING FLAVORS THAT EXPLODE. I LOOK FOR INGREDIENTS THAT RESONATE WITH DEEP FLAVOR FOR THE STARTING POINT OF ANY SOUP. THEN I ASK, "HOW DO I MAKE THIS SOUP JUMP?" THAT'S THE ROLE OF THE FUN GARNISHES ADDED AT THE END. THIS COMBINATION OF GOALS YIELDS SOUPS THAT ARE AT ONCE HOMESPUN AND ELEGANT.



SALADS

REGARDLESS OF THE SEASON, SALADS CELEBRATE THE BOUNTY OF THE FARM. I LET THE INGREDIENTS SHINE, WHETHER THROUGH TENDER LETTUCES AND GREENS OR VIVIDLY FLAVORED CRUNCHY VEGETABLES. NO HEAVY DRESSINGS HERE. INSTEAD, I OPT FOR A SIMPLE, LIGHT VINAIGRETTE THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE INGREDIENTS' NATURAL FLAVORS. I OFTEN COMBINE RAW AND COOKED ELEMENTS IN A SALAD TO ADD SAVORY DEPTH AND INTEREST.

SPRING ON THE FARM



Hope, for me, is defined by walking into the farm’s field to harvest on the first warm days of the year. Despite winter’s lingering adversity, everything is possible once the season’s days begin to warm. Spring combines that glowing warmth with bracing cold—sometimes on the same day. Our harvests and cooking style reflect that, too: long slow-cooked dishes and hearty broths accented with the delicate flowers and tiny leaves I crave after a long winter without.

SQUASH BLOSSOMS
Quick chilling after harvest is essential when harvesting squash blossoms. I like to harvest them early in the morning, well before the afternoon heat is on. Open each flower as you go, for occasionally you’ll find a trapped bee inside.



APPETIZERS

UNLIKE OTHER COURSES THAT NEED TO ACCOMPLISH A LOT, APPETIZERS ARE SMALLER, DIRECT DISHES THAT ARE IDEAL FOR SHOWCASING THE FLAVORS THAT INSPIRE US: PEAS THAT EXPLODE WITH SWEET FLAVOR, THE VIVID AROMA OF BASIL, FRESH CORN JUST MINUTES FROM ITS HARVEST. COOKING TECHNIQUES ASIDE, THESE DISHES ARE QUITE SIMPLE: AN INSPIRATION FROM THE FIELD COMBINED WITH THE QUEST FOR THE PERFECT BITE.

SUMMER ON THE FARM



“Make hay while the sun shines,” my grandfather used to say. How aptly it describes our farm each summer. The weeks change from glowing warm to intensely hot. While the sweet tomatoes and crisp summer beans destined for the July or August dinner table grow to perfection, the pressure is on to grow vegetables that sustain our restaurants through the cold months as well. Like with the pumpkins or parsnips we’ll use in November, much of the fields are devoted to the future. Of course, we make hay, too, as the animals will need something to eat in the winter. After spending a morning in the field heat, my thoughts are on dinners that cool and refresh. Simple meats off the grill paired with crisp, chilled vegetables suit me during the summer.


YOUNG (OR GREEN) GARLIC

In the kitchen, garlic has a more interesting story than just the papery cloves we normally see. Traditionally, garlic is planted in the fall and grows slowly through the winter. In the spring, the plant sends up leaves reminiscent of baby leeks. To hold up its flower, the plant produces a firm stalk, or scape. The whole plant can be eaten and tastes pleasantly like garlic. I love to use scapes for purées and soups. I also mince and toss the leaves into salads in lieu of chives. The flowers are perfect on top of crispy potato latkes or with lox on a bagel. My favorite beyond-the-clove use for garlic, though, is for young garlic bulbs—simply a garlic plant harvested before the bulb is fully mature. As the papery cover on the cloves has not fully formed, there is no need to peel, making prep time a snap. Young garlic retains an herbal note that I find endearing. I often make a risotto flavored with the chopped tops that highlights their refreshing, spicy, vegetal note. Or, I’ll pickle fingernail-sized heads to use as a foil for rich meats.



PORK

THE OLD FARMER'S SAYING, "EVERYTHING BUT THE SQUEAK," IS VERY APPROPRIATE FOR WHICH PARTS OF THE PIG TO USE. FROM NOSE TO TAIL, IT'S EASY TO FIND DELICIOUS USES FOR THE WHOLE HOG. TAKE THE TIME TO SEARCH FOR PASTURE-RAISED HERITAGE BREED PIGS. THE RESULTS IN THE KITCHEN ARE WORTH EVERY BIT OF THE EFFORT.



LAMB & RABBIT

I'VE COME TO LOVE COOKING LAMB SHANKS AND SHOULDERS MOST. THEY MAKE FOR PERFECTLY BRAISED DISHES THAT TASTE WONDERFUL (AND ARE OFTEN THE EASIEST). OUR FARM NEIGHBOR PRODUCES THE RABBITS FOR OUR RESTAURANT AND IS THE SOURCE OF MANY PETER RABBIT JOKES. YOU CAN FIND RABBIT AT BUTCHER SHOPS, FARMER'S MARKETS OR SPECIAL ORDER FROM GROCERY STORES.

AUTUMN ON THE FARM



Thinking about fall harvests, I am humbled by the bounty of our farm. The tail end of summer vegetables is still with us as the nights turn chilly. Then along come the fall vegetables: pumpkins, fall roots, cabbages and greens. In autumn, there is always much more than we can use. The hours spent in the fields are replaced with hours behind the stove putting up the harvest for winter. Giant pots of tomato sauce, vats of homemade pickles and sauerkraut, brandied fruits, and apple butter are just some of the regulars added to the fall larder. Deep in the fall, when the last of the warmth has left the air, we begin to fill the giant root cellars under the farm. By the beginning of December, the harvest is in and safely tucked away. The farm has been put to bed.

PUMPKINS
The Black Cat Farm pumpkin patch extends over 5 acres and includes a selection of fourteen varieties. All winter squashes or pumpkins (there is no botanical separation between the two) fall into three types: pepo, maxima and moschata, each with its own unique qualities. The pepos include the small acorns and delicata squashes that are perfect for roasting and then stuffing. The flesh of the maxima group is drier, denser, and packed with flavor. These make the best soups and purées. While the thin-skinned moschatas, like butternut and tromboncino, excel when peeling and dicing is necessary. Growing winter squashes at home is easy, especially if you have the space to let the vines run across the yard. And run they will!



BEEF

FOR MY BIRTHDAY, I GOT NUMBER 25 AND NUMBER 26, OUR SHAGGY SCOTTISH HIGHLAND CATTLE. I'D BEEN INTERESTED IN RAISING CATTLE FOR BEEF IN THE RESTAURANT, BUT I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT IT. YOU SEE, I'M NO RANCHER, I'M A FARMER. I'M STILL NOT A COWBOY, THOUGH. I HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE NEXT BIRTHDAY. I'M HOPING FOR A HAT AND BOOTS.

WINTER ON THE FARM



While the pace of the farm slows in winter there is always plenty to do. The farm operates year-round to supply the restaurants; in winter, it's a great challenge. There are animals to keep warm and happy, equipment and water lines to keep from freezing, not to mention our fingers and toes. Even moving from place to place is a workout in deep, snowy fields. Harvesting field greens for the restaurants is the biggest challenge. When buried under a thick layer of snow, we wield long push brooms to gently liberate the rows a few feet at a time. After sweeping off the snow, we peel back the protective covers above the harvest, exposing the sweet, delicious greens underneath. I'm amazed we can pull it off; a glorious harvest found below such a bleak wintry scene. But in the challenge lies the integrity and it's the integrity that lets us sleep soundly, warm in our beds.

CARDOONS

More than most vegetables I sell at the farmer's market, cardoons need a quick recipe to go along with the purchase. I have to admit, most of my recipes come from conversations with the Italian transplants that frequent our stand. Their reaction to seeing the crates of cardoons is nothing short of shouts of pure joy: "Cardoni! Cardoni!" All cardoon recipes share a common braising step. First, the ribs are peeled to remove the spines and tough outer fibers. I keep lemon halves handy to rub the exposed surfaces to prevent browning. Next, the ribs are cut into manageable lengths and braised in water or stock until tender. In Sicily, the braised cardoons are breaded lightly and fried crisp to contrast their buttery artichoke-like interiors, and accompanied by a simple lemony aioli. Another swoon-worthy dish is a gratin with the braised ribs topped with mint and pine nuts. Unless you are cooking for a big Sicilian family, there will probably be leftover cardoons from the braising step. I store these in a glass container in the fridge, covered with a simple vinaigrette of lemon, olive oil and oregano, for months.



FISH

SOURCING FRESH, DELICIOUS FISH COMES DOWN TO TURNOVER. THAT IS, THE FISHMONGER WHO SELLS THE MOST FISH ALSO SELLS THE FRESHEST FISH. MOST OF THE FISH IN THIS CHAPTER ARE AVAILABLE THROUGH OUR LOCAL FISHMONGER. YOURS CAN EASILY PLACE A SPECIAL ORDER FOR YOU.



WILD FORAGED

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR THERE ARE ALWAYS EDIBLE, WILD HERBS AVAILABLE.

EARLY IN THE SPRING, DANDELIONS AND NETTLES ARE AT THEIR PEAK.

LATER IN THE YEAR THE LAMB'S QUARTERS AND MALLOW ARE DELICIOUS.

AS THE YEAR TURNS COLDER, I LOOK FOR CHICKWEED AND WILD LETTUCE.

NOW THAT I KNOW WHICH PLANTS TO LOOK FOR, I'M ALWAYS AMAZED TO SEE

SO MUCH DELICIOUS FOOD LITERALLY UNDERFOOT.



THE LARDER

ONE OF THE SECRETS TO COOKING SEASONALLY FROM THE GARDEN IS THE USE OF “BUILDING BLOCK” RECIPES. THESE ARE QUICK RECIPES THAT CAN BE MADE AHEAD AND PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN MAKING A GREAT DISH. ROASTED GARLIC AND ROASTED GARLIC OIL, OR A GOOD ALL-PURPOSE VINAIGRETTE, HAVE A MUCH GREATER EFFECT THAN THE EFFORT NEEDED TO MAKE THEM. OFTENTIMES, THESE RECIPES ARE THE “GLUE” THAT CAN HOLD A COLLECTION OF FRESH PRODUCE TOGETHER AND TURN IT INTO A MEMORABLE MEAL.