

The Chef's Garden

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« PUMPKIN – NOT JUST FOR PIE

THE END OF A SEASON – MUSINGS ON THE PAST YEAR

January 2nd, 2014 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Tim here writing the last post for the year. While traveling this summer I visited the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and there was a very interesting exhibit by Fritz Haeg titled Domestic Integrities. Domestic Integrities explored the ways we use what we find around us in the city, bringing landscapes and gardens into our homes. To that end the artist had placed a large circular rug that was continuously being crocheted in the center of

the exhibit space and on the rug were placements of materials harvested and processed from Foraging Circle, a garden Mr. Haeg had established in the front yard of a Minneapolis area home. These included fresh and dried plants, including seedheads, flowers, and fresh vegetables, as well as edible products made from them. Gallery goers were encouraged to kick their shoes off and lay down or sit on the rug and examine and think about the various garden products displayed.

On the back wall of the exhibit was a large aerial map of Minneapolis and environs and anyone with a garden was encouraged to pinpoint the location of their garden with a colored tack pin. I of course pinpointed THE CHEF'S GARDEN at the edge of the map with an arrow pointing east. At the time it was the farthest garden referenced on the map but it may have been supplanted since.

Available to those who visited the Domestic Integrities installation was the Twin Cities Home Garden Wild Season Circle, a sort of circular garden calendar highlighting seasonal chores to do and garden products to be utilized and enjoyed. Now that winter is here (and boy did it start off earlier and colder than usual) I am perusing Mr. Haeg's calendar. I see that Susan and I are doing some of the exact things indicated on the calendar. These include cooking root vegetable soups, ordering seeds, and planning next year's garden beds. We are happy to have shared our

garden experience with you the reader and hope you enjoyed not only what we learned from gardening in this our first year but also some of the recipes that were proffered to utilize the fresh produce as it was harvested.

Mr. Haeg's exhibit highlighted for me the importance of gardening in people's lives and just as we bring the garden into our homes (as he so well demonstrates), the garden can find a home in our psyche. I know that to be true as I am surely enjoying the memories of this, our first year in the life of THE CHEF'S GARDEN.

PUMPKIN – NOT JUST FOR PIE

December 30th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Tim here. It is holiday time and THE CHEF'S GARDEN has long been put to rest for the winter - it is only appropriate

however that the last food article for the year should be about pumpkin, a traditional holiday vegetable. Susan and I did not intentionally plant any pumpkin. One sprouted as one of the "compost vegetables" mentioned in an earlier column. When we enriched the soil in spring with compost from Susan's compost pile, it contained some viable seeds which came up as surprise volunteers. We kept several out of curiosity and also for the fun of it and one turned out to be this fantastic green pumpkin which was gathered at the season's last harvest just before Halloween. .

I love pumpkin and have harvested the flesh of fresh ones for many autumns now but there is a trick to it. In the past I tried to peel the thick skin away with a knife and then cube the uncooked flesh, a most difficult task and one that has left a small scar in the pad of my left thumb. The skin is just too thick to remove easily. However with small and medium sized pumpkins one can partially roast them whole in the oven at about 375 degrees for 30 minutes or so. This softens the flesh enough so that one can cut the pumpkin in half and then easily peel the flesh away from the skin in huge blocks after removal of the pumpkin seeds. The latter can be cleaned and then roasted at 400 degrees for 5-10 minutes or so and then salted for a tasty snack if desired. As the pumpkin flesh has only partially been cooked it will remain mostly intact and can be cubed and put aside for later use. The flesh at the bottom resting on the baking sheet may be fully cooked and softened however and can be stored as pumpkin puree.



Everyone knows about pumpkin pie and this is what most people make with the vegetable. Pumpkin is though nothing more than a big squash and can readily be utilized as the basis for savory soups and stews

which is what I like to do with it. With my pumpkin harvest I made a curried pumpkin soup. Try it and I think you will agree – pumpkin is not just for pies!

SPICY PUMPKIN SOUP WITH BACON

Ingredients

- 11/2 lb. pumpkin flesh (fresh or canned) cut into one inch chunks
- 2 tomatoes, blanched, skinned, and chopped
- 11/2 cups peeled diced carrots
- 1 celery stalk, trimmed and chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tbs sunflower or olive oil
- 1 tbs flour
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 1/2 lb bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 2-3 teaspoons curry powder or chipotle chile powder (if New Mexican seasoning is desired)
- pumpkin seeds and nutmeg as desired for garnish

Directions

1. Stir fry the pumpkin, tomato, onion, carrots, and celery in saucepan with the oil over moderate heat for 5 min. or so, and then stir in the desired spice and cook for a minute more.
2. Stir in the flour. Remove the pot from the burner and stir in the stock. Puree the mixture in a blender or use an immersion (hand) blender.
3. Return mixture to pot if using a regular blender.
4. Fry the bacon for 3-4 minutes or until crisp. Drain, crumble, and add to soup.

5. Bring to a boil and simmer for 5 min. stirring. Serve garnished with pumpkin seeds and/or nutmeg.



BEING GREEN GOES FOR TOMATOES TOO!

November 30th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Fall in THE CHEF'S GARDEN means the season of green tomatoes. As the first frost nears in the south all of the unripened fruits of the tomato plant are traditionally harvested and usually fried. This ensures that they do not go to waste. The frying softens and slightly sweetens the unripe tomatoes making them palatable. Of course one could have fried green tomatoes during the summer – all one needs to do is pick the tomatoes before they have a chance to ripen. Most people though prefer juicy ripe red tomatoes in the summer. Fried green tomatoes make the best of a bad situation – producing a tasty dish on what could be lost to frost at season's end.

Susan and I love green tomatoes. We harvested all our tomatoes the weekend before Halloween. I thought there might be a healthier way to prepare them however so I sliced them, dredged them through beaten egg, coated them with Panko bread crumbs, and then broiled them at 475 degrees for 5 minutes. The resulting dish looked similiar to fried green tomatoes. Alas – though edible they were not quite as tasty as the fried ones. Either the heat was not strong enough for the softening and caramelization to occur or they were not broiled long enough although the tops had already browned. I asked Susan, the cooking expert, how to improve the process and she suggested the highest broiler heat (525 degrees) and a slightly longer cooking time. She also indicated that she likes to bake green tomatoes in the oven. Now I know! I used the remainder of the broiled tomatoes in a pasta dish after adding some olive oil and minced garlic and baking them at 375 for half an hour. The pasta dish was delicious! It just goes to show that one must be prepared to improvise when things don't go exactly according to plan. Another lesson courtesy of THE CHEF'S GARDEN. And ultimately the tomatoes were not lost to frost.



BASIL BASICS – HOLY PESTO!

November 22nd, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Susan and I both love basil and put plenty into THE CHEF'S GARDEN this year. We planted two types : Genovese basil and Thai basil. The former is the more

traditional basil beloved in Italian cooking while the latter is spicier and good in Asian dishes. We had started the basil from seed in February and put the plants into the garden in May – we supplemented the seedlings with a few additional plants bought at nurseries of the Genovese basil which Susan particularly loves.

Basil is an almost foolproof herb as long as it is planted after the soil has warmed up enough and so long as it is put in a nice sunny spot with as much sunshine as you can provide it. Given these conditions the plants thrive and provide more than enough leaves for the dinner table. The blossoms can also be used similarly for flavor and provide an interesting decorative touch in dishes. Pinching the blossoms for use also keeps the plants producing plenty of leaves.

The leaves are used in many Italian dishes and salads, one of the better known being tomato mozzarella and basil drizzled with olive oil. Equally well known is pesto sauce, which arrived in kitchens with a big bang back in the eighties and has since settled into a bit of a lesser role in today's cooking. When the garden's harvest is at its end however there is no better way to preserve that summery basil flavor than by picking the remaining leaves and making a big batch of pesto sauce which can then be frozen for use in the long months of winter to come. Then one can sit back, enjoying the summer flavors and reminiscing about the beautiful summer garden while the winter winds howl.

The following recipe is another one that I believe is from the Washington Post food section sometime in the eighties. It is my go to recipe whenever I feel the need to make pesto. Try it and see – I think you will agree it makes a fine flavorful pesto sauce. The recipe makes 1 cup of sauce. I made a big batch to enjoy in the coming cold weather. Thank you CHEF'S GARDEN for continuing to provide sustenance even long after you have been put to bed for the winter.

INGREDIENTS OTHER THAN BASIL



PESTO SAUCE

2 cups of fresh basil leaves

1/2 cup fresh Italian parsley leaves

1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted at 375 degrees for 5 min or so

2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped

1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper

1/2 cup olive oil

4 tbsp grated parmesan cheese

1. Place basil, parsley, nuts, garlic, pepper, and oil in blender or bowl of food processor with a steel blade. Process until smooth (scrape sides once or twice).

2. With motor off add 2 tbsp cheese. Process 15 seconds. Remove to bowl. Fold in remaining cheese. Refrigerate or freeze until use.





LIKING LEEKS

November 15th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Susan and I finally harvested the leeks in THE CHEF'S



GARDEN along with other last harvest odds and ends (a bunch of green tomatoes, a few peppers and carrots, a pumpkin, the remaining basil). Everything except the perennial herbs were then yanked out in preparation for enriching and enhancing the beds for next spring. Our end of harvest bounty was pretty good considering the date – October 29th!

Our leeks were started from seed in Susan's shop window in February and then put into the garden in midspring. The soil was mounded up around them as they grew and had been enhanced with sand. At harvest the leeks were not particularly fat but all were well formed. The variety we had chosen to grow was called Roxton. Susan and I split the leeks and with my take and some fresh parsley from the garden, I made leeks vinaigrette.

Leeks vinaigrette is an easy and delicious french bistro specialty which I like to make when leeks are at their best. I got the recipe from the food section in the Washington Post sometime in the late 80's I believe and it has always been a favorite of mine. The dish is silky and velvety and the dressing gets absorbed by the warm leeks and enhances their already terrific flavor. Be sure to clean the leeks well by cutting in half lengthwise and holding under fresh water while splaying the layers so all the grit gets washed out. Leeks tend to accumulate dirt in their leaves as they grow upwards. The recipe is below and I hope you like it as much as I do. I am sure to like this batch even more, knowing Susan and I grew them ourselves in THE CHEF'S GARDEN.

LEEKS VINAIGRETTE

1 1/2 lbs. leeks, sliced in half and washed well (get the grit out)

1 tbsp dijon mustard

Juice of half a lemon

4 tbsp finely chopped parsley, chervil, or chives

1 tbsp wine vinegar

4-5 tbsp olive oil

Freshly ground black pepper

Salt

1. Cut off roots of leeks and tie leeks into a neat bundle with string or twist tie. Cook in rapidly boiling water for 4-6 minutes or until tender. Refresh under cold water and drain.

2. Prepare the dressing. Whisk the mustard with the vinegar, lemon juice, and 1/4 tsp salt. Whisk in oil in a thin stream. The sauce should emulsify. Correct seasoning with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Chop the herbs. Arrange leeks in a shallow serving dish just large enough to hold them. Pour vinaigrette on top, turning leeks so all are covered. This step is best done when they are still warm to enhance absorption.

4. The recipe can be prepared 24 hours in advance to this stage. To serve, sprinkle with chopped herbs. Best if leeks have marinated in the refrigerator.



**EGGPLANT – SUMMER'S INCREDIBLE
EDIBLE – IF ONLY WE HAD MORE!**

November 12th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »

Tim here. One of the last warm weather vegetables harvested from THE CHEF'S GARDEN was eggplant. We had a total of seven plants but unfortunately the vegetable output was diminished by the drought in mid August and September. The variety we had chosen was Rosa Bianca. This variety has globe shaped fruits with a beautiful purple and white striped pattern. Like all eggplants it produces a beautiful nodding bell shaped bluish purple flower. We had raised the plants from seed in February and put them into the garden in May after the soil had warmed up. They are warm weather vegetables and will not thrive in soil or weather that is insufficiently hot. Photos of the beautiful fruit and blossom are below.



The quantity of eggplant produced was disappointing but I was able to enjoy them. I took those three eggplants and sliced them up and coated them with olive oil. I roasted them in the oven at 400 degrees along with several cloves of peeled garlic, a few small peppers also harvested from the garden, and sprigs of rosemary and thyme. When the eggplant slices were tender, after approximately 40 minutes, I discarded the herbs, seeded and chopped the peppers, and mashed the eggplant, garlic, and peppers into a baba ganoush type of dish. It was delicious. Sometimes as in most of life it is not the quantity but the quality of a thing that makes a project worthwhile. And then one has no regrets!



RADISH RANTS

October 30th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Tim here. This is the last post from midsummer not yet posted. More current posts will now follow.

I have to say that Susan and I enjoyed our first crop of radishes immensely – so much so that when they were harvested we immediately sowed a second crop in the same area. The radishes are a variety called Sparkler White Tips. They were beauties (pictured above on the top) and among the first delightful produce of the garden along with the lettuces, arugula, and spinach.

Our second sowing did not reap as beautiful and bountiful a crop. The second sowing occurred in mid spring around May 1st and the weather was predominantly cool although here and there there were a few very warm days. As you can see from the picture above bottom these radishes did not have the beautiful color of the first crop and multiple plants failed to produce any radishes at all, tapering instead into thin slender roots – definitely not the bulbs of well formed radishes. At first we thought that the extra warm days in the later spring did them in but were set on the right track by Susan's farmer friends Lori and Toni. We had not sown the radishes in a different area, a process known as crop rotation. We therefore set them up for infestation with nematodes and other pests. For many vegetables crop rotation is a must to prevent and limit damage from insects and pathogens. The formed radishes were still tasty but just not as beautiful or abundant - no county fair prize winners these! To get those county fair crops Susan and I both know now that rotation is key.

Oh were Susan and I proud of that first crop – but as the saying goes, “pride goeth before a fall”. In that regard I daresay we are in the

company of many gardeners when it comes to this. But gardeners are good company to be in nonetheless. And rotation will be practiced from here on out in THE CHEF'S GARDEN.

CARROTS – USED IN THE MAKING OF A MAGICAL EVENING!

October 27th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Tim here. Although it is now mid-autumn this is a post I had finished in August. I hope you enjoy it and now that I am back from a long trip more current posts will be published.

Susan and I have been harvesting a terrific crop of carrots. The carrots are of a variety called Scarlet Nantes, which is appreciated for its fine texture, mild flavor and small cores. The carrots were directly sown into the garden in rows in the early spring and covered with burlap kept moistened every day until germination occurred. Once germination occurred the seedlings were thinned to about two inches apart. Our chilly spring meant good growth. Prior to planting the soil had been previously reinforced with sand to produce a nice sandy loam. This helps to ensure nice straight carrots (rocks and other debris cause them to bend and divert from the straight and narrow like nuns at a casino). As you can see we got what we were after. We started harvesting the tender roots the latter half of June.

I love Susan's and Louie's food and so I engaged them to cater a special birthday party event in mid-July at the shop. As usual they did not disappoint. The menu included canapes (mini crabcakes, mini pizza slices, and phyllo cups filled with eggplant confit) that freely used the herbs from THE CHEF'S GARDEN. The entree was a wonderful poached salmon on a bed of lentils and carrots with a yogurt sauce flanked by a green bean corn medley. I was happy to know that the carrots Susan and I had raised ourselves were used in their delicious entree. The dessert was a terrific blueberry peach pie with almond streusel. Thanks Susan and Louie – the dinner was a terrific success!



JAMMIN' WITH ONIONS

August 4th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »





Susan here. Onions are such an important part of cooking. They add a sweetness and a depth of flavor to many savory dishes. While our onions were small, they were awfully tasty—especially when I used some of them in an onion marmalade. Keep some of this in your refrigerator and use it as a relish for hamburgers, to accompany grilled flank steak or even as a filling for a quiche. We used this recipe as a garnish for our grilled flank steak. The leftovers went on a panini with roast beef and goat cheese.

Onion marmalade:

4 medium onions-red or white- cut in half and thinly sliced

1 tablespoon of chopped fresh rosemary

1/2 cup red wine vinegar

1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil

3 tablespoons dark brown sugar

salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Saute the onions and rosemary in a skillet with the olive oil until translucent. Add the brown sugar and continue to saute at a low temperature until the onions are well caramelized. You may need to occasionally add 1 tsp of water so that the onions do not burn. The key is to get the onions a beautiful brown and caramelized color (this could take 30- 45 minutes). Stir the onions from time to time. When they are caramelized, add the vinegar and scrape up the lovely bits in the bottom of the pan. Add salt and pepper to taste. Cool and refrigerate. The marmalade should last a week refrigerated.





TASTY ONION MARMALADE



OUR SQUASH IS AHEAD OF ITS TIME

July 19th, 2013 . Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#) »



Tim here. Susan and I put plenty of compost from Susan's compost heap into THE CHEF'S GARDEN in early spring. That compost had formed from lawn clippings and food scraps from Susan's eatery. We were a little surprised when some of the seeds from the food scraps survived the decomposition process and actually germinated. Susan and I coined the phrase "compost vegetables" for these unplanned plants. Most of them we pulled out as seedlings as we did not know the varieties springing up nor did they fit into our overall garden plan. A few we kept however just for the fun of it.

As the curcubit plants grew we wondered what they would turn out to be and fantasized about early summer squash or zucchini. We recently got our answers and, boy, were we surprised. One was a perfectly beautiful round zucchini which Susan used in zucchini pancakes in the shop. The other was ———an acorn squash, a distinctly fall vegetable!

I decided to use what had been provided, seasonal or not – therefore I summered that squash up. I halved it and seeded it, roasted it flesh side down at 350 for 30 minutes, then turned it flesh side up and filled the cavity with summery things -diced onion, julienned basil from the garden, and chopped walnuts (pine nuts would have been more summer like but I had none at the time). I drizzled olive oil over all and returned it to the oven for 25 minutes. When it came out I topped it with grated parmesan cheese. That squash didn't know what hit it – it tasted like the essence of summer. So when things don't go as planned, GET CREATIVE. That's the lesson for today from THE CHEF'S GARDEN.





THE FINISHED PRODUCT – A SUMMERY ACORN SQUASH

