

# Hogtown HomeGrown

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Inside this issue:

**One bottle,  
five candles  
and no singing** 1

**What's Fresh  
Right Now?** 2

**Local and Fresh—  
Sweet Bell Peppers** 2

**Leslee's  
Quinoa and Feta  
Stuffed Peppers** 2

**Refrigerator  
Pickled Sweet  
Peppers** 3

**Sautéed Sweet  
Peppers with  
Balsamic** 3

**Mango Soup** 4

## One bottle, five candles and no singing

My philosophy has always been “Birthday celebrations should last at least a week and involve three cakes,” but I turned sixty on July 20th and had something much more epic in mind. Planning began a year ago for a trip to San Francisco to see the musical *Hamilton* and eat at a few of the best local food restaurants. Then Slow Food announced a gathering in Denver, I became a delegate and the trip grew. We’d fly into Denver and home from San Francisco. In between, we’d travel from Denver to San Francisco via Amtrak.

The birthday bottle was given to me before we got on the train. On our last night at Slow Food Nations, Italian Prosecco was waiting on ice in our room at the Oxford Hotel, with the staff’s compliments for a happy birthday. I knew we wouldn’t drink it, so I gifted it to a new friend, Daniel Asher, chef and partner from River and Woods in Boulder, Colorado. He promised to share it with the chefs and workshop leaders who created our final feast, a Zero Waste Family Meal, made from all the extra food not used during the amazing cooking workshops.

The next morning we boarded the train at Union Station for a 33 hour ride in our little roomette for two. The California Zephyr follows the Colorado River for a while, winds through the Rocky Mountains and climbs through the Sierra Nevadas. Vistas of mountains and deserts gave way to views of mountains and forests, on to cliffs and deserts, followed by valleys filled with lush vineyards, fields of alfalfa and groves of peach, olive and almond trees.

The first candle was the night the train pulled into San Francisco, delivered with a laugh by our waiter at the only Portuguese restaurant in the city, Uma Casa. He had tried to get me to order dessert, but brought out a Portuguese Custard Tart with a candle in it anyway when I said I was too full to eat another bite. And yes, I ate two bites of that sweet treat!

The next candle was presented at my actual birthday lunch by our waiter Colin in the upstairs Café of the iconic Chez Panisse. Attached to the plate, the beeswax candle cast a faint glow over the Nectarine Raspberry Galette, Lemon Verbena Ice Cream and a small paper banner with watercolor and calligraphy birthday wishes.

The third candle was later that evening, after *Hamilton*, at Nopa. Reservations are notoriously hard to get, but very late at night, they can find you a table for two. Our post-theater supper included another candle in a super-special dessert of roasted peaches wrapped in warm cornmeal crepes and served with buttermilk ice cream.

That was when I noticed it—they don’t sing for birthdays in this town! After that, the silent candles were no longer a surprise. The fourth was on my cheese plate from an incredible Sardinian restaurant, LaCiccia. The fifth and final candle was at Sutro’s in the Cliff House, atop a cup of chocolate mousse presented on a plate decorated with a piped chocolate (and very silent) “Happy Birthday!” I still haven’t decided if I missed the singing or not, but I am so grateful to have had the opportunity for such an epic birthday trip!

## What's Fresh Right Now?

**Bananas**

**Bitter melon**

**Cucumbers**—slicers, kirby

**Eggplants**—purple/white/graffiti italian, purple/white/green asian, thai

**Elderberries**

**Greens**—collards, chard, okinawa spinach, amaranth, lamb's quarters

**Herbs**—garlic chives, turmeric, parsley, cilantro, spearmint, rosemary

**Melons**—watermelon, cantaloupe

**Moringa**

**Mushrooms**—chanterelles, dried shiitakes

**Okra**—green

**Onions**—yellow, sweet

**Papaya**

**Peas**—white acre, black eye, creamer, zipper

**Pears**

**Peppers**—red/green/yellow/orange sweet bell, poblano, jalapeño, shishito, italian frying, red cherry, cubanelle

**Pineapple**

**Potatoes**—red

**Squash**—green zucchini, acorn, butternut, spaghetti, blue hubbard, kabocha, delicata

**Sweet Potatoes**

**Tomatoes**—plum, beefsteak, cherry, grape

### Have you heard the latest?

For the past couple of years, WCJB TV20 has aired a segment called *What's Growing On?* every Thursday during the evening news between 5:30 and 6:00 p.m. This 2-3 minute report was started by Grow Gainesville and has given television viewers a tremendous amount of information on gardening and farming in our area. Last April, they began airing a cooking segment on the second Thursday of each month. Filmed in my home kitchen, I teach a recipe featured in that month's *Hogtown HomeGrown*. Look for this month's segment on Thursday, August 10th, between 5:30 and 6:00 p.m.

## Local and Fresh—

## Sweet Bell Peppers

It's that time of year, hot, humid and pepper time! You've seen them at the markets—big bright beautiful green, red, yellow, orange and even purple.

Sweet bell peppers don't have a spicy taste, although the green ones can be a source of heartburn. The red, yellow and orange have a mild, sweet flavor. They are a tasty and crunchy addition to all kinds of dishes, even fruit salads!

Look for smooth skins and firm stems. Store refrigerated in a loosely closed plastic bag and use a week or two after harvesting.

## Leslee's Quinoa and Feta Stuffed Peppers

### INGREDIENTS

2 bell peppers, halved and seeded  
1 cup cooked quinoa  
2 Tablespoons olive oil  
1/2 red onion, diced  
2-3 cloves garlic, minced  
Freshly ground black pepper  
1/4 cup roasted almonds, chopped  
1/2 cup crumbled feta

### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.  
Heat olive oil in heavy skillet. Sauté red onion in olive oil. Add garlic and cook until soft. Season with black pepper as desired.  
Mix together quinoa, cooked onions and garlic, almonds and feta. Stuff into pepper halves.  
Bake 20-30 minutes until filling is hot and peppers are cooked to desired doneness.  
Serve hot.  
Cover and refrigerate leftovers.



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Our season has ended, but we will see you out in the community and at the Alachua County Farmers' Market soon. Take good care of yourselves, and continue to be kind to one another.

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# Refrigerator Pickled Sweet Peppers

## INGREDIENTS

4 cups white vinegar  
1/4 cup sherry vinegar or favorite vinegar  
2 cups water  
1/4 - 1/2 cup honey (less honey equals sharper vinegar taste)  
2 Tablespoons coarse pure sea salt (check salt labels for any additives)  
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns  
6-8 sweet bell peppers, core, seeds and ribs removed

## DIRECTIONS

Combine vinegars, water, honey, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil.  
Slice peppers as desired. Continue with recipe of choice:

**CRISPY PEPPERS**—Tightly pack slices of raw peppers into hot, sterilized jars. Pour hot vinegar mixture over peppers to cover. Slide a clean butter knife around the inside of the jar to release any air bubbles. Make sure peppers are completely covered with vinegar mixture. Cover tightly and refrigerate 48 hours before tasting. Use or discard within one month.

**SOFT SANDWICH PEPPERS**—Add cut peppers to boiling vinegar mixture. Return to boil and cook 8-10 minutes. Pack cooked peppers into hot, sterilized jars. Pour hot vinegar mixture over peppers making sure peppers are completely covered. Slide a clean butter knife around the inside of the jar to release any air bubbles. Cover tightly and refrigerate 48 hours before tasting. Use or discard within one month.

# Sautéed Sweet Peppers with Balsamic

## INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons olive oil  
2-3 sweet bell peppers, cored, seeded and thinly sliced  
1/4 cup shallot or red onion, thinly sliced  
1/4 cup white balsamic vinegar  
Salt and freshly ground pepper, if desired  
1 teaspoon honey, if desired

## DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet. Stir in pepper and shallot to coat with oil.  
Sauté over medium-low heat until cooked and limp, about 10-12 minutes.

Add vinegar, bring to a simmer and remove from heat. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt, pepper and honey as desired. Serve hot, cold or at room temperature.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

## Tricks and Tips

There are times when a meal needs a little something to create excitement. Pickles fill that void nicely and refrigerator pickles are easy to create, whether using traditional pickling vegetables like cucumbers or something a little different like sweet or hot peppers.

It has been quite a few years since I fell in love with the pickled sweet peppers stacked on my Hogan Heroes' hoagie. The peppers were sweet, soft and luscious—the perfect foil to rich cheeses and dressings. Since I like large pieces for sandwiches, I cut raw peppers into halves or quarters to make perfect pickled sandwich stackers.

While I prefer large pieces of soft pickled peppers on sandwiches, sometimes a little crunch is just what we need to complete a dinner plate. Slim strips make perfect Crispy Peppers, so slice the raw peppers into strips less than half an inch wide. Small pieces makes it easier to tightly pack the peppers to completely fill the jars.



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Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More

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### Tricks and Tips

What can you do with mangoes that are full of the fibrous strands that make the delicious fruit impossible to enjoy?

Boil. Puree. Strain.

Once the peeled mangoes are boiled with their pits, puree all the fruit and strain out the fiber. The resulting mango puree can be used to make not only Mango Soup, but other dishes as well.

Use it to make jams, butters or glazes.

Mix into fruit salad dressings or marinades for meat and seafood.

Use in baked goods.

Mix with heavy cream and milk to make mango ice cream.

## Mango Soup

### INGREDIENTS

8-12 fibrous mangoes, peeled

Water to cover

1-2 Tablespoons freshly grated ginger root

Zest and juice of 1-2 limes

Honey or maple syrup to sweeten, as needed

### DIRECTIONS

Place peeled mangoes in deep heavy-bottomed pot with water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and cover. Simmer for 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Set aside to cool.

Use very clean hands to squeeze fruit and fiber off each mango pit. Puree all fruit and fiber in a food processor or blender in batches. Strain pureed fruit, pressing the pulp through the screen.

Return strained fruit to pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer and cook uncovered until reduced by half. Add ginger plus the lime zest and juice. Taste and adjust sweetness, as desired, with honey or maple syrup.

Strain soup a second time, again pushing pulp through screen.

Chill soup before serving.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

### SERVING SUGGESTIONS

Top with diced raw mango.

Stir into whipped cream to make a mousse that can be served chilled or frozen.

Top with whipped cream and finely chopped crystallized ginger.