

Hogtown HomeGrown™

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The future's so bright...

When my husband started working for the State, back in the mid-eighties, we both knew retirement would come someday but we were busy with our three sons and it seemed so far away. Well, it looks like someday is the end of September and we both couldn't be happier. No more alarm clocks and finally a chance to travel without having to count the days of annual leave.

We want to see the country and the world, but our funds are more pension than golden parachute. Hotel rooms at every destination and restaurant meals three times a day can't be the itinerary for all our travels. With a little compromise, we hit on a plan that will let us see the sites within driving distance, especially the National Parks, by car. Our accommodations will include our three room tent, hotels with kitchens and occasionally the guest room of friends or family for a night or two (Benjamin Franklin famously said that fish and houseguests smell after three days).

Key to this plan is the availability of a kitchen. Being able to shop and cook allows us to eat local wherever we go. If we get a hotel room with an adequate kitchen for a night or two, we can fill up the fridge from the local farmers markets and grocers. We'll take the time to prep and cook for the week ahead, then off we go on the road again with our tent and food that is ready to eat.

This method of travel is something we have been unconsciously practicing for years. When the boys were younger, weekend trips to the beach included a room with a kitchen because we could afford either the hotel room or meals at restaurants with three growing boys, but not both! Pots of pasta, seemingly endless sandwiches and bowl after bowl of cereal are my travel kitchen memories of those years, I also remember bringing our 2 gallon pots from home because the hotel's weren't big enough!

Practice makes perfect, but a packing list for your favorite kitchen tools, supplies and pantry items makes each trip easier. I keep a cloth bag in the car with picnic basics, but cooking more than one or two meals away from home is easier if certain items are on hand.

Coolers and ice packs are a must.

Reusable storage containers for prepped food.

Good knife, spatula, peeler, grater and rasp.

Big pot with steamer basket and cast iron skillet.

Olive oil, salt/pepper grinders and apple cider vinegar.

Yes, some hotel room kitchens might have some of these items, but there is no guarantee, so if you know you will need it, pack it. Check with your hotel or plan a flexible menu since ovens are not in every kitchenette either.

So, we haven't mapped out a route yet and the length of our adventures will depend on family obligations, but we feel pretty prepared to embark on this hybrid travel style for longer and longer trips. The future looks bright as we drive off into the sunset—well, not quite yet. Although, now that I think of it, since Hogtown HomeGrown's last issue is in May, I am technically retiring first. Time to get out the maps and atlases!

What's Fresh Right Now?

Bananas

Beets—red, golden, long

Bok choy

Broccoli

Brussels sprouts

Cabbage—green head, napa, flathead, cone, savoy, red

Carrots—orange, yellow, rainbow

Cauliflower

Citrus—oranges, grapefruit, lemons, tangerines, limequats

Cucumber

Fennel

Garlic—chives

Ginger

Greens—collards, curly/tuscan/red/white russian kale, red/green mustards, spinach, escarole, summerfest, chard, rappini, endive, turnip, mizuna

Herbs—parsley, cilantro, curry leaf, thai basil, mint, thyme, tulsii, dill, kaffir lime, lemongrass

Honey—orange blossom, gallberry, wildflower, tupelo

Jicama

Kohlrabi

Lettuces—spring mix, mizuna, arugula, red/green leaf, romaine, frisee, butter

Moringa

Mushrooms—shiitake, white/blue/yellow oyster, lion's mane, trumpet, dried shiitake

Onions—green

Papaya

Peppers—green bell, jalapeno, datil, aji dulce, bird's eye

Pineapple

Radish—red/purple globe, white/purple daikon, watermelon, black

Rutabaga

Shoots and Sprouts

Squash—butternut, acorn

Strawberries

Snow peas

Sugarsnap peas

Sweet Potatoes

Tomatoes—slicer, sun gold, red plum, green

Turmeric

Turnips

Local and Fresh— Fennel

You've no doubt heard of the holy trinity of cooking, onion, celery and bell pepper. In our house we use fennel in place of bell pepper and it is a wonderful alternative.

Touted as tasting like anise or licorice, large pungent fennel bulbs served raw could overwhelm the senses. But if you take that same fennel and cook it slowly until it is browned, the rich sweetness of this veggie provides a wonderful flavor base.

Fennel seed provides the distinctive flavor in sweet Italian sausage. I often use fennel seed in combination with fresh fennel to deepen the flavors.

If you do serve raw fennel, look for small tender bulbs and slice thinly. Citrus juice and a little salt can be a complete dressing for such a versatile vegetable.

Look for healthy fronds and clean bulbs without cuts or bruises. Store wrapped in a towel in the produce drawer. Remove fronds if storing more than a few days.

Fennel Tomato Sauce with Artichokes

INGREDIENTS

1 onion, cut into thin strips
1-2 fennel, cut into thin strips
3 cups crushed tomatoes
3 cloves garlic, smashed and peeled
1-2 Tablespoons fresh oregano leaves
1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves
1 cup flat leaf parsley, chopped
1-2 cups artichokes, coarsely chopped
Salt

DIRECTIONS

In a large lidded pot over medium heat, stir together onion and fennel. Salt lightly and cook until tender and browned.

Add remaining ingredients, stir well and cook covered for 30 minutes.

Stir well before serving.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Cabbage Fennel Stew

INGREDIENTS

1 onion, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
1-2 fennel, chopped
1 carrot, finely chopped
1 teaspoon each caraway and fennel seeds
1 orange, zested and juiced
Pinch of hot dried chipotle pepper
2 Tablespoons tomato paste
1-2 cups diced tomatoes
1/4 cup raisins
1/2 green cabbage, cut into 1 inch pieces, about 8 cups
2-3 green onions, chopped
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
White balsamic vinegar to taste

DIRECTIONS

In a large lidded pot over medium heat, stir together onion, celery, fennel and carrot. Season with a little salt and cook until lightly browned and sweet.

Clear a space in the bottom off the pot and add caraway and fennel seeds, orange zest and hot pepper on one side and the tomato paste on the other. Stir separately until fragrant and beginning to stick. Add orange juice and tomatoes. Stir well, scraping the pot as needed.

Stir in raisins, cabbage and green onions. Season with salt and pepper, cover and cook for 10 minutes. Stir well and cook an additional 5 minutes or until the cabbage is tender.

Taste and add white balsamic vinegar to create the sweet and spicy taste you desire. Stir well, let sit covered for 5 minutes. Stir again and serve hot or warm.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Lemon Ginger Slaw

INGREDIENTS

2 inch chunk of ginger, peeled and coarsely grated
Juice of 1 meyer lemon OR 1/2 lemon and 1/2 orange
1/2 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
1/2 head red cabbage, thinly sliced into long strips
Salt

DIRECTIONS

Mix together ginger, juice and vinegar. Add cabbage, salt lightly and stir well.

Cover slaw and refrigerate one hour to blend the flavors. Store covered in refrigerator.

Beans and Greens

INGREDIENTS

1 onion, chopped
1/2 red bell pepper, chopped
1 small fennel bulb, chopped
2-4 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
Pinch of Red pepper flakes (optional)
15-16 ounces cannellini beans, drained
1-2 cups tomatoes, canned or fresh, diced
Salt and pepper
1/2 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
10 ounces combined escarole and spinach

DIRECTIONS

In a large pot with a lid, dry sauté onions, pepper and fennel until translucent.

Add garlic and, stirring constantly, cook until softened.

Stir in red pepper flakes, beans, tomato, salt, pepper and vinegar. Cook until hot and bubbly.

Add greens, stir well and cover pot. Simmer on low heat for 10 minutes.

Stir well. Serve hot.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

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Tricks and Tips

Hummingbird Cake is one of those Southern cakes that doesn't get much notice, but is a welcome addition to any dessert lineup.

This traditional butter-sugar-flour spice cake with pecans is made sweet and moist with the additions of mashed banana and crushed pineapple. Made in layers, Hummingbird Cake is usually filled and topped with cream cheese frosting.

Needless to say, this is not an everyday food, but I tried to find another way to use the flavors. Perfect on top of oatmeal, the fruit adds sweetness and the pecans add crunch!

Hummingbird Breakfast Bowl

INGREDIENTS PER SERVING

- 4 ounces cooked grains OR roasted and mashed sweet potato or winter squash
- Light sprinkle of cinnamon
- 3 ounces pineapple, chopped finely
- 3 ounces banana, chopped finely
- 1-2 ounces pecans, toasted and chopped

DIRECTIONS

- Place ingredients in the order listed in a bowl or a wide-mouth pint jar.
- If prepping meals in advance, be sure the pecans stay on top of the banana so they retain their crunch.

FOR BEST RESULTS

- Make bowl with warm grains or sweet potato, whether freshly cooked or reheated.
- Roast a fresh pineapple and serve warm.
- To store for more than a day, toss chopped banana with a little lemon juice.

PB and B Breakfast Bowl

INGREDIENTS PER SERVING

- 4 ounces cooked oatmeal or other grain
- 1-2 Tablespoons warm water
- 1-2 ounces all natural peanut butter
- 6 ounces banana, sliced or chopped

DIRECTIONS

- Mix grain with 1 Tablespoon warm water and stir in peanut butter, adding more water if necessary. Top with banana. Serve immediately or store covered in refrigerator.