

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Springtime in the Kitchen

Spring is a wonderful time to cook with fresh, local ingredients. Salad greens are abundant, vegetables are young and tender and it is still cool enough to spend some time in the kitchen. During these warmer days, I find myself making the switch from using the oven to stovetop and microwave cooking. This change in habit comes from years of living without air-conditioning. In our old house, there was no cool spot in the kitchen and at one point, there wasn't even a ceiling fan. One summer, I went on a cooking strike, refusing to cook until someone (my husband or sons) installed the ceiling fan that was sitting in the utility room ready to go. It only took 10 days of sandwiches and pizza before the fan and I were in place and working. I know I can turn on the A/C in our wonderful new home, but old habits are hard to break. Case in point—during a recent cool snap I found myself baking and roasting one last time before the summer heat hits. I made one last batch of bread—onion rolls and whole wheat bread—roasted three bunches of beets, dozens of plum tomatoes and two pounds of nuts to use in salads and recipes. Here's one yummy recipe from that tomato roasting adventure—

Roasted Plum Tomatoes, Spinach and Pasta

INGREDIENTS

- 30 small plum tomatoes
- 3-4 Tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 3 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
- 6-8 cups fresh, cleaned spinach
- 1 pound whole wheat thin spaghetti
- 8 ounces basil-tomato feta

DIRECTIONS

Cut plum tomatoes in half, dip cut side in olive oil, place cut side up on parchment or foil covered cookie sheet. Season with salt and pepper, if desired. Bake at 350-375 for 60-90 minutes until caramelized.

Cook spaghetti according to package instructions. Drain and toss with 1 Tablespoon olive oil. Set aside.

In large saucepan, heat remaining oil and sauté garlic until golden. Add spinach leaves and stir until wilted. Stir in tomatoes and mix until combined and heated through. Serve spinach-tomato mixture on top of whole wheat spaghetti. Sprinkle with feta and serve immediately.

Fresh herbs can be added to this dish—either sauté along with the spinach or chop finely and sprinkle on top with feta cheese. Basil or oregano are the best choices, but fresh thyme is good also!

It's Local, It's Fresh, It's Beets

Tricks and Tips

Beets are known for their ability to stain everything they touch—counters, cutting boards and fingers. Clean up stains immediately and wash your hands as soon as possible. Don't worry about pink or red in the bathroom, it is the natural end result of eating beets.

Beets, the familiar sphere-shaped root vegetable, range from golf ball to baseball size. The more familiar varieties are red, but some of the newer varieties are golden, some are purple and some even have alternating rings resembling a target. No matter what the color, beets are a sweetish, earthy vegetable that can be served raw or cooked. Beet roots can be boiled, roasted, pickled or sauced (like the famous Harvard Beets—just beets cooked with a thick cornstarch sauce flavored with sugar and vinegar.)

Beets have some unusual cousins—sugar beets, which are processed to create white sugar, and leaf beets, which form no sphere-shaped root. One of the oldest vegetables known to European cooking, leaf beets have been recorded in recipes since the 13th century. They have a red center stem with kale-like leaves and are better known as Swiss Chard. Delicious when cooked as greens, Swiss Chard contains the same antioxidants, vitamins and minerals as beet roots.

What's fresh right now at the Farmers' Market?

Never used fennel before? It has feathery tops, similar to dill, and a bulb-like body that looks like a celery relative. Cut the tops off near the bulb and cut the bulb either lengthwise for strips or crosswise for smaller pieces. Fennel has an anise or light licorice flavor and tastes best with citrus flavors, especially orange

Beets	Carrots
Squash	—with green tops
—yellow, zucchini, acorn	Cucumbers
Kohlrabi	—small hydroponic
Cabbage	Peppers
—Green, Chinese	—assorted
Broccoli	Strawberries
Cauliflower	—ripe berries, baskets
Kale	Herbs
Swiss Chard	—parsley, cilantro, basil,
Greens	dill, seedlings
—Turnip, Collards	Citrus
Fennel	—oranges, grapefruit
Spinach	trees
Arugula	Honey
Radicchio	—Tupelo, Basswood,
Endive	Gallberry
Sorrel	Pecans
Lettuce	—shelled and in shell
—baskets, hydroponic	Flowers
Tomatoes	—cut snapdragons, petu-
—cherry, orange, yellow,	nia pots and baskets, ama-
plum, plants	ryliis, seedlings, bedding
Onions	plants
—with greens, white	Native Plants
Leeks	—Columbine, Bridal
Eggplant	Wreath, Native Azalea

Roasted Beets

If you are starting with a bunch of beets and the greens look fresh and tender, cut them off and save them for soups or stir-frying. Trim the stem and root end of each beet, wash thoroughly and pat dry with paper towels. Wrap one large or 3 small beets, with a drizzle of olive oil, in individual foil packets. You can add salt and pepper if desired. Place packets on a baking sheet and place in a 350-400 degree oven. Bake for about 45 minutes (larger beets can take longer), flipping packets over halfway through cooking time. Beets are done when you can press your finger into the side of the packet and the beet feels soft. You can also open a packet and use a knife to test the beets. After removing from oven, let them cool until they can be handled easily. Unwrap each packet and use your fingers to just slip the skin off each beet. (If you rub a little oil onto your hands, you will have fewer stains to wash off later.) Store roasted beets in the refrigerator for up to a week.

Beet, Fennel and Orange Salad

INGREDIENTS

1 bunch roasted beets (6-8) cooled, chopped
1 bulb fennel, sliced crosswise
1 large orange, zested, peeled, chopped
1/4 cup olive oil
1/4 cup orange juice
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Salt and Pepper to taste

In a glass bowl, mix beets, fennel and chopped orange. In a jar with a lid, mix oil, juices, zest, mustard, salt and pepper. Shake well to blend. Pour dressing onto salad, stirring well to coat. Serve immediately or let marinate in the refrigerator before serving. Can be served on a bed of greens. If you want colors to remain distinct, compose each salad on its own plate and serve with dressing on the side.

Beet Borscht

INGREDIENTS

1 bunch roasted beets (6-8) cooled, grated
4 cups veggie or no-chicken broth
1 small boiled potato per person

Mix grated beets into broth. Heat until soup simmers. Serve with a boiled potato in bowl and cover with soup. Can be served chilled—skip the potato and dollop with sour cream.

Pickled Beets with Onions

INGREDIENTS

1 bunch roasted beets (6-8), cooled, sliced
1 small sweet onion, sliced
OR
1 bunch green onions, sliced
1/2 cup rice wine vinegar
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt

Place sliced beets and onions in a ziploc freezer bag or glass container. Mix dressing ingredients until sugar and salt dissolve. Taste for sweetness and add more sugar if needed. Pour over beets and mix lightly. Refrigerate at least 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Good side dish with heavy or rich dishes.

Beets with Honey

INGREDIENTS

1 bunch roasted beets (6-8) cooled, diced
1 orange, zested (save the orange for later)
1/4 cup honey
1-2 tablespoons butter, optional

Place honey, zest and butter, if you wish, in a heavy saucepan and heat until small bubbles form. Stir in beets, coat thoroughly and warm through before serving. You won't have leftovers!

Tricks and Tips

If you have a blender this soup just got easier—just drop quartered beets into blender with 2 cups of the broth and hit grate—perfect borscht without pink fingers!

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Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More
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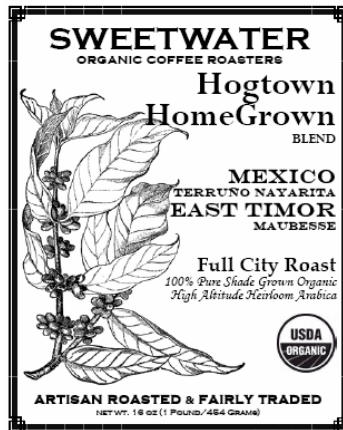
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Vegan Vichyssoise

INGREDIENTS

- 1 bunch of small leeks or 2 large leeks, sliced—use all the white and 2-3 inches of the greens
- 1 bunch green onions, chopped (optional)
- 4 medium sized russet potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 cups veggie or no-chicken broth
- 1/4 cup brandy (optional)

Over medium-low heat, sauté leeks and green onions in olive oil until soft and translucent. Add potatoes and stir to coat with oil. Let cook on low for about 5 minutes. Cover with broth, bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low, cover and cook until potatoes are cooked through and falling apart. Let cool. Puree in blender with brandy until completely smooth. To be safe, make sure the soup is cool and blend in two batches—hot soup in a blender can be a explosive disaster! Serve chilled or warm. Cream can be added if you'd like, but this vichyssoise is wonderfully simple with a pure taste of vegetables, so I don't add anything.

Tricks and Tips

Cleaning leeks can be tricky—sand and dirt like to hide in each crevice. The easiest method is to cut the leek in half lengthwise, then hold under running water to clean each layer. Another method is to slice or chop the leeks first, then rinse in a colander.