

# Hogtown HomeGrown

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## Not everyone eats like Americans!

They say that traveling broadens your horizons. Unfortunately, it can also broaden your hips, but that's another story. Recent travels to Italy, Croatia, Greece and Spain have really expanded my world view on how people from other cultures eat.

After our trip to Italy two years ago, I became even more determined to eat as much local, seasonal food as possible. Watching Italians shop daily for their food reinforced the idea of eating fresh food, not too much, and mostly plants (thank you Michael Pollan.) While daily shopping at farmers markets, local bakeries, butchers and specialty stores is not always possible in the States, it is possible to shop for the week at the farmers markets and plan your meals from the wealth of food grown in North Central Florida.

Last month I was in Dubrovnik, Croatia. It has a climate similar to Florida and is on the Adriatic Sea, so tropical plants grow easily there. While citrus trees shade patios, vegetable gardens are perched beside their homes covering the steep mountainsides. Fast food and American brands are virtually unknown in this recovering, war-torn part of the world.

Paulina, our twenty-something guide, is typical of her generation—college educated to be a teacher, she works two jobs in a country that has an average salary of 800 euros a month (about \$1100.) In Croatia, family is important and food traditions are passed on to each generation. Paulina shops for locally grown greens and hand-made cheeses at her local weekly market and cooks her own food, as do her friends, unless they still live at home, where mom or grandma cooks for everyone. Western style fast food is non-existent, and most of the restaurants are geared towards the thriving and essential tourism industry.

Asked to describe a celebration meal, like a wedding, Pauline told me they would start with an appetizer of ham and cheeses, served much like an Italian antipasta. (You know that simply means before the pasta course, don't you?) In Croatian meals, the second course is typically a salad of some sort, the most common being what they call a French salad—simple vegetables, like carrots and green beans, served in a mayonnaise dressing.

After the salad would be risotto or gnocchi made with either a little meat or seafood for flavor. Clams and mussels are farmed within an hour's drive. Local fish from the Adriatic Sea is divided into two classes—white refers to sea bass and other light fish, while blue fish describes the heavier, oily fishes such as mackerel.

Following the "carb" course would be a meat or veal roast served with potatoes. These roasts are flavored with olive oil (grown in the region), onions, garlic and the widely available Mediterranean spices of rosemary, basil and oregano. Sweet paprika is frequently used by these Southern Slavs, but not the spicy kind—they like mildly flavored foods.

Desserts are usually pastry or cakes, made with nuts and fruits. Besides coffee and tea, wine and grappa are popular. Special drinks made by infusing grappa or grape brandy with walnuts, fruit or herbs, plus added sugar, create a potent flavorful treat.

We often have an American-centric view of food, but for many around the world, sufficient food is a struggle and, for even more people, meals are a daily source of enjoyment that must be made by hand. Not everyone is affected by the scourge of fast food and I, for one, hope to see more people cooking as the food movement makes its high-stakes claim on our country and our eating habits.



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## What's Fresh Right Now?

- Beans**—green, yellow
- Bok Choy**
- Cabbage**—chinese
- Citrus**—juices, satsumas
- Cucumbers**—slicers, mini seedless, kirby
- Eggplant**—purple, japanese, rosita, florida highbush, black beauty, orient express, hansen
- Garlic**—chives
- Greens**—callaloo, tropical spinach, cress, collards, giant red mustard, turnip, spinach, summer fest, kale
- Herbs**—italian basil, thai basil
- Honey**—orange blossom, gallberry, tupelo, palmetto, everglades
- Lettuce**—mizuna, arugula, salad mix, romaine, santo
- Microgreens**—assorted
- Mushrooms**—chanterelles, shitake, pioppino
- Okra**
- Onions**—green, yellow
- Papaya**—green
- Peas**—creamer, white acre, southern
- Peppers**—green/red/yellow sweet bell, banana, jalapeno, poblano, hot/sweet banana, black beauty, cayenne, chocolate, habanero, hungarian sweet, cubanelle
- Persimmons**
- Potatoes**—red, sweet
- Radish**—globe, french breakfast
- Roselle**
- Shoots**—pea, sunflower, corn, spring mix
- Sprouts**—alfalfa, clover, quinoa, wheat, sunflower, garbanzo, mung bean, french lentil, green lentil, radish
- Squash**—calabaza, pumpkin, yellow, kabocha, hubbard, acorn, butter nut, zucchini, georgia sugar roaster, buttercup, jarrah dale
- Tomatoes**—red beefsteak, grape, plum
- Wheatgrass**

## Local and Fresh— Pumpkin

North Central Florida is a good place to live if you are a pumpkin fan. Not only can farmers and gardeners grow the traditional orange winter squash so familiar to all of us, but we also have indigenous species which are well-suited to our climate and have been grown in this area since before the invasion of European explorers.

Seminole pumpkins and calabazas are botanically similar to the large jack-o-lanterns, but are tan instead of orange, and sometimes have greenish streaks. These species are sweeter and the flavor can be compared to sugar or pie pumpkins.

Cutting up a large pumpkin can be daunting, but a large, sharp knife and a good vegetable peeler can make quick work of even the hardest squash.

## Pumpkin with Herbs and Cheese

### INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups cubed pumpkin
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 2 Tablespoons fresh thyme leaves, chopped
- 8 fresh sage leaves, finely chopped
- Pinch of freshly ground pepper
- 1/2 cup aged hard cheese, finely grated

### DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
- In a bowl, toss pumpkin cubes with olive oil, herbs and pepper until evenly coated.
- Place seasoned pumpkin in a shallow baking dish and bake 60-90 minutes or until easily pierced by a fork. Remove from oven. This may be done up to 24 hours in advance, then covered and left at room temperature.
- Top baked pumpkin with grated cheese and return to oven to melt cheese. If a crispy topping is desired, heat until cheese is browned. Serve hot or at room temperature.
- Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

# Baked Pesto Shrimp

## INGREDIENTS

2 cups fresh basil leaves (try lemon basil—it complements the flavor of the lemon zest)  
1/2 cup pine nuts  
2-4 cloves garlic  
Zest of 1 lemon  
1/4 - 1/3 cup olive oil  
1 pound shrimp, peeled  
Pinch of salt (optional)  
Freshly ground pepper to taste  
Pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)

## DIRECTIONS

At least one hour before serving, puree basil leaves, pine nuts, garlic cloves and lemon zest in a food processor or blender until a chunky paste is formed. Add olive oil while machine is running, using just enough to form a loose paste. Scoop into a heavy duty zip-top plastic bag and add peeled shrimp. Seal bag, removing as much air as possible, and “massage” bag until all shrimp are thoroughly coated with pesto. Place in refrigerator to marinate until ready to cook.

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Arrange shrimp in one layer on a baking pan. Bake until pink and just firm—about 5 minutes. The shrimp continue to cook when removed from oven, so be careful not to overcook. Add salt and peppers, if desired.

Serve immediately. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

## PRESENTATION

Serve atop a bed of raw arugula, cooked brown rice or angel hair pasta. May be garnished with grated hard cheese, such as parmesan, but the pesto flavor is more distinct without added cheese. Try it with a squeeze of lemon juice instead!

# Pumpkin Cranberry Bake

## INGREDIENTS

4 cups cubed pumpkin, tossed in olive oil and roasted until tender  
1 cup fresh or frozen whole cranberries  
1/2 cup dried cranberries or dried currants  
1/2 cup maple syrup

## DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Lightly grease a shallow baking dish.

Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl and lightly toss to combine. Spread evenly in prepared baking dish. Bake 20 minutes, or until whole cranberries have burst.

Serve hot or at room temperature. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

## Tricks and Tips

Pesto is traditionally made in a mortar and pestle, grinding the basil and other ingredients by hand, then adding olive oil a little at a time to create a smooth paste.

While the result is tasty, it isn't a practical way to make large amounts of pesto. For years I used a blender, but only because I did not own a food processor. Now I pop the basil, nuts and garlic into the processor, pulse several times

until it is just chopped, add the olive oil (and cheese if I want it finely ground) and finish processing until it is chunky, but completely mixed. Some

people prefer a smoother paste that will coat pasta, but I like leaving it a bit coarser to emphasize the characteristics of each ingredient. Experiment with different consistencies to find out what you prefer—it may differ for each recipe!

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**Tricks and Tips**  
 Baking pumpkin pies was a project I developed for my scout dens when I served as a leader. Each boy made two pies, one for their family and one for St. Francis House. Through the years, the scouts enjoyed not only the satisfaction of contributing to their family's celebration, but also helping those who had no way to create their own holiday meal.

## Cub Scout Pumpkin Pies

### INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups roasted pumpkin OR canned pumpkin (not pumpkin filling)
- 2 deep dish pie shells, unbaked OR 2 deep dish graham cracker crusts
- ½ cup honey
- 3 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon each ground ginger, nutmeg and cloves
- 1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk OR 1 ½ cups whole milk

### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place pie shells on cookie sheets. Set aside.

Place pumpkin in a large bowl. Add remaining ingredients in the order given, whisking well between each addition until completely combined. Pour mixture into pie shells, dividing evenly. Smooth top with the back of a spoon.

Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees and bake an additional 20-30 minutes, until center is set. Remove from oven and cool before serving.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.