

# Hogtown HomeGrown

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**Inside this issue:**

**A beautiful bouquet of basil** 1

**Deconstructed Lemon Pesto Salad** 1

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

**Local and Fresh—Persimmons** 2

**Andi's Crockpot Vanilla Persimmon Butter** 2

**Herbed Eggplant Pasta Bake** 3

**Persimmon Cucumber Salad** 3

**Chocolate Peanut Butter Bar Cookies** 4

## A beautiful bouquet of basil

Panic mode—my basil guy's crop turned yellow and the pesto class is in three days. Where can I find a pound of basil? The first farmer's email was filled with regret—her husband had just plowed their basil field under. The second farmer had a cute greeting message on her cell, but never called back.

So I did what any modern businesswoman would do—Facebook! Yes, that addictive “social networking tool” provides a sea of “friends” willing to help out. I typed out my plea, hit send and hoped for the best.

Before dinner that night, Emily Piazza from Mosswood Farm Store let me know that Ed Sherwood of Ochwilla Hill Farm in Hawthorne brought bunches of basil to Mosswood's Sunday Farmers Market. A quick call to Ed assured me that he could cut a pound of tops from his long rows of Genovese basil—and at a reasonable price.

When I met up with him on Friday afternoon at the Melrose Farmers Market, Ed not only had more than enough basil for the pesto class, but he made me feel like Miss America by flourishing a bouquet of flower-laden lemon basil as a gift. It made the ride home smell heavenly and I popped the whole beautiful bouquet into a vase. The next day, I pulled it apart to create a new dish using both the leaves and the flowers.

Basil flowers and buds are full of tasty oils which really enhance the lemon in this easy salad that is perfect for your next tailgate or potluck party. If you don't have a bouquet of lemon basil, don't despair, just use what you have—it will be delicious.

## Deconstructed Lemon Pesto Salad

### INGREDIENTS

2 cups cooked orzo, drained and rinsed in cold water  
2 cups chopped zucchini, chopped into very small pieces  
1/2 cup lemon basil, leaves, flowers and buds  
1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted  
1 teaspoon lemon zest  
1/4 cup olive oil  
2 Tablespoons lemon juice  
1 clove garlic, grated or very finely chopped  
1/2 cup parmesan, shredded  
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

### DIRECTIONS

Mix together orzo, zucchini, basil, pine nuts and lemon zest.  
In a separate bowl, stir together olive oil, lemon juice and garlic. Drizzle over salad and toss until coated. Mix in cheese and taste before seasoning.  
Serve at room temperature. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.



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## What's Fresh Right Now?

Beans—green/purple long, winged  
Bitter Melon  
Chestnuts  
Corn  
Citrus—juices  
Cucumbers—mini seedless, slicers  
Eggplant—small/large, purple/white  
                  italian, small/large purple oriental  
Garlic—chives  
Greens—malabar spinach  
Herbs—italian basil, spicy bush,  
                  lemon basil, thai basil  
Honey—orange blossom, wildflower,  
                  gallberry, tupelo  
Melon—watermelon  
Microgreens—arugula, radish  
Mushrooms—shiitake, oyster, chanterelle  
Okra  
Onions—green scallions, dry yellow  
Papaya  
Peanuts—green, boiled  
Peas—white acre, butterbeans, pink-eye  
Peppers—green/red/yellow sweet bell,  
                  cayenne, jalapeno, habanero  
Persimmons  
Potatoes—red, sweet  
Quince  
Radish—microgreens  
Shoots—pea, sunflower, corn, spring mix  
Sprouts—alfalfa, clover, quinoa, wheat,  
                  sunflower, garbanzo, mung bean,  
                  french lentil, green lentil, radish  
Squash—summer yellow, zucchini,  
                  delicata, acorn, butternut  
Tomatoes—red beefsteak, cluster, grape,  
                  green  
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## Local and Fresh—

### Persimmons

What's shaped like a tomato or an egg, colored like a pumpkin, and can be as crisp as an apple or as soft as jelly? You guessed it—persimmons!

Grown locally in many varieties, persimmons are native to China, but have been actively cultivated all over the world. Seeds and grafts brought to this country in the mid-nineteenth century became a huge cash crop in California. Other smaller plantings around the country inspired the cherished food tradition of Persimmon Pudding in the Midwest.

Although both astringent varieties and non-astringent types are available locally—the difference is the amount of tannin in the firm fruit—I prefer the non-astringent for eating raw.

If buying either type, look for evenly colored, smooth skin. While you can buy firm astringent types, you might want to get some fully ripe ones so you don't have to wait so long to eat them or use them in this recipe!

## Andi's Crockpot Vanilla Persimmon Butter

### INGREDIENTS

18 very ripe persimmons  
1 vanilla bean pod, split lengthwise  
1 1/2 cups of organic turbinado sugar

### DIRECTIONS

Cut a slit in the bottom of each persimmon and squeeze contents into crockpot. Add vanilla bean. Cook on high heat until it begins to simmer, then set heat on low and cook 6-8 hours. Let cool. Remove vanilla bean.

Puree in a food processor or blender and return to crockpot. Cook on high heat until mixture simmers, stir in sugar and turn heat to low. Cook until it reaches desired thickness.

Serve or can and process immediately.

# Herbed Eggplant Pasta Bake

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 large Italian eggplant, peeled and cut into 3/4 inch cubes
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 Tablespoon each fennel seeds and dried basil
- 1 teaspoon each dried oregano and thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon each granulated garlic, salt and freshly ground black pepper OR red pepper flakes
- 3 cups of your favorite marinara or spaghetti sauce
- 1/2 cup water
- 8 ounces pasta, cooked al dente and drained (try whole wheat penne)
- 4 ounces smoked mozzarella, shredded

## DIRECTIONS

Lightly oil a 2-3 quart oven-proof baking dish.

Heat a large covered pan over medium high heat. Add eggplant to hot, dry pan and stir until little spots of char or caramelization appear on bottom of pan. Add olive oil, stir to coat thoroughly and cover pan. Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until eggplant is softened, but retains its shape.

Stir in all the spices, cover and cook 3 minutes. Stir in sauce and water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer at least 15 minutes. Add pasta and stir until all pasta is coated with sauce. Cover and cook 5 minutes.

Pour everything into baking dish. Top with cheese. Bake 30 minutes, until cheese is melted. Allow to rest for 5 minutes before serving. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

# Persimmon Cucumber Salad

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
- 2 firm non-astringent persimmons, peeled and diced
- 2 Tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 Tablespoons lime juice (lemon juice is okay, but lime juice is better)
- 1 Tablespoon each olive oil and mild vinegar (white wine or unseasoned rice wine)
- 1 teaspoon lime zest
- 2 green onions, finely chopped
- salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste

## DIRECTIONS

Combine cucumber and persimmon in serving bowl. Mix together remaining ingredients and pour over veggies. Stir gently to combine. Serve immediately or cover and refrigerate.

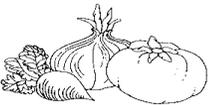
## Tips and Tricks

You might have noticed that I didn't give the instruction to preheat your oven. I would probably turn my oven on after I added the sauce and covered the pot to simmer for 15 minutes, but it depends on how long your oven takes to preheat.

This dish can be made ahead and, since it is a tomato-based recipe, the flavors will actually blend and improve if it is made the day before baking and serving. If you make it ahead, pour the pasta mixture into the casserole, but do not add the cheese. Cover with foil and refrigerate. When ready to cook, preheat oven, leave foil on and bake for 20 minutes. Remove foil, top with cheese and bake until hot and cheese is melted.

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Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More

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## Tricks and Tips

Yes, I do make a lot of cookies. To help save time and money, while I'm cooking, and the oven is already hot, I put in a pan of bar cookies to bake. Why bar cookies? The oven will maintain its temperature to cook other things since I won't be opening it every 8-10 minutes to remove a batch of cookies. Plus, bar cookies are much faster to make.

## Chocolate Peanut Butter Bar Cookies

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 stick unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup raw or turbinado sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup natural peanut butter (no added sweeteners or fats)
- 1 cup each whole wheat flour and all purpose flour
- 1/3 cup cocoa
- 1/2 teaspoon each baking powder and baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup rolled oats, preferably thick cut

### DIRECTIONS

Lightly butter a 9 x 12 baking dish. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

Mix sugar into butter, stir in vanilla and peanut butter, then beat in eggs one at a time.

In a separate bowl mix both flours, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Stir into butter mixture until completely combined. Stir in oatmeal until distributed.

Lightly press into baking dish. Bake 20-25 minutes until edges are firm and center springs back when touched. Let cool before cutting.

SERVING SUGGESTION: Use two cookies to make an ice cream sandwich. Can be made ahead, wrapped tightly and frozen until just before serving.