

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Change, growth and resolutions

Fall is always the start of a new year—a time for schoolchildren to meet new teachers, make new friends and learn new things. It would be tempting to think that adults, especially empty nesters like my husband and I, would lose that peculiar calendar cycle, but having the University of Florida, Santa Fe College and, of course, Fall Football Season as constant reminders, September still retains that new year feel.

As with every new year, fall for me is a time to grow through resolutions and change. It was almost four years ago that I started Hogtown HomeGrown on a shoestring, hoping others would be as interested in seasonal, local food as I was. Then the local food movement took over our town and our country—even the White House is eating local these days. All of you wonderful readers embraced Hogtown HomeGrown, from the very first issue. Thank you so much for your continued interest and support.

This November marks the 4th anniversary of that first issue. We have gone from 500 copies to distributing 2000 free newsletters every month. The Hogtown HomeGrown website, which debuted in April 2007 (I remember cheering over every new hit), now receives worldwide hits from people looking for seasonal recipes.

It is now time to grow again! Unfortunately, printing costs and environmental concerns have eliminated the possibility of doubling the newsletter with two staples in the middle, so my fall resolution is to create an economically and environmentally viable expansion. Starting in November we will have additional content available online. Depending on the month, it could be one page or four pages—who knows?!? If you want to print it out and insert it in your issue, you can, but I would encourage our readers to take the green alternative and think before you print. Read the extra pages online—less clutter, yet always available for reference! More pages online not only means more recipes, but guest columnists sharing their expert knowledge of fresh herbs, wine pairings and local meats.

Well, now that I have mentioned the word “meat”... Like many of you, my husband and I choose to eat fish, dairy and eggs, but no “meat”. Our eating habits have left some wonderful local food producers out of the Hogtown HomeGrown loop—I simply cannot write recipes for what I don't eat. With that in mind, the online pages will have a new column—The Conscious Carnivore—which will feature guest chefs and include information and recipes for locally “grown”, sustainably raised beef, pork, poultry and seafood.

So as we enjoy another fall together, let me hear from you! I would love to get your recipes for the online Community Recipe page. As we expand our circulation to 3000, let me know of more good distribution spots for the newsletter.

And don't forget those fall resolutions—mine are very familiar...

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What's Fresh Right Now?

- Arugula
- Basil—italian, thai, spicy bush, microgreens
- Cabbage—green head
- Cucumbers—mini seedless, slicers, Kirby
- Eggplant—purple italian, turkish, white/purple asian, multi-colored small
- Fuzzy Melon (loki)
- Garlic—chives
- Herbs—basil, garlic chives
- Honey—gallberry, orange blossom
- Microgreens—basil, arugula, radish
- Mushrooms—shitake, chanterelle
- Okra
- Pears—native
- Peas—white acre, black/pink eye
- Peppers—green/yellow sweet bell, cayenne, habanero, banana, scotch bonnet, datil, “heatless” hot types
- Potatoes—white, red, sweet
- Pumpkins—calabasa, seminole
- Radish—microgreens
- Shoots—pea, corn, sunflower
- Spinach—malabar
- Squash—green/orange acorn, butternut, summer, zucchini, calabasa, seminole
- Sprouts—at least 8 varieties
- Sweet Potatoes
- Tomatoes—red/orange beefsteak, grape

Local and Fresh—

Acorn Squash

Literally shaped like an acorn—an acorn that’s 3-6 inches across—these hard “winter” squash have dense flesh surrounding a seed pocket. The thick, hard skin allows a long shelf-life at room temperature.

Most people think of winter squash in the fall, but they are in our markets now. Just look for large green or orange “acorns” at your favorite farmer’s stand. They should feel heavy for their size and have smooth skins.

Acorn squash can be cooked very simply—cut in half, scoop out seeds and roast, cut side down, for 45 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve with a squeeze of orange juice, a sprinkle of cinnamon or a dollop of honey. Make acorn squash a meal with this savory stuffing—fruit, veggies and protein all baked into one beautiful squash.

Acorn Squash with Savory Stuffing

INGREDIENTS

- 2 acorn squash
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 apple, cored and diced
- 1 stalk celery, sliced
- fresh or dried thyme, marjoram or sage to taste
- 4 soy sausages, cooked
- 2 Tablespoons raisins or dried cranberries
- 1 cup torn bread pieces
- 1/2 cup apple juice (more if the bread is dry)
- olive oil to drizzle

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Halve and clean squash. Bake squash 45 minutes.

Heat oil in skillet. Sauté onions until soft. Stir in apple, celery, sausages and herb. Sauté 5 minutes. Combine cooked mixture with raisins, bread and apple juice, stuff into baked squash halves and drizzle with olive oil.

Bake 20 minutes, until filling is hot. Serve immediately. Refrigerate leftovers.

Saffron Seafood Chowder

INGREDIENTS

3 Tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 large sweet onion, diced
6 stalks celery, thinly sliced
1 large carrot, grated
1 small acorn squash, peeled and diced
2 red potatoes, diced
15-20 threads of inexpensive saffron
4 cups seafood stock or veggie broth
1 1/2 pounds fresh grouper, leave filet whole
salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup sherry (optional)
Optional Topping: 1 Tablespoon of thai basil flowers (the leaves are too strong)

DIRECTIONS

Heat 2 Tablespoons of oil in large covered pot over medium heat, add onions, sauté until soft. Add remaining veggies. Sauté, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Add reserved oil and half the saffron, stir to combine. Pour in stock and simmer covered for 45 minutes.

Season fish with salt and pepper. Stir remaining saffron into broth. Lay whole fish filet on top of veggies and broth, spoon veggies over the top, cover pot and cook on low for ten minutes. Lightly stir to break fish into large chunks. Stir in sherry and serve. Refrigerate leftovers.

Zucchini Tortellini

INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, cut into thin strips
2 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
3 cups zucchini, cut into bite-sized chunks
4 cups no-chicken or veggie broth
1/2 cup dry sherry or water
1 cup dry tortellini
1 cup grape tomatoes, halved
1/2 cup italian or thai basil, torn into pieces
Toppings: red wine vinegar, fresh basil, shredded parmesan, freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

Heat large covered pot on medium-high heat and then add olive oil. Stir in onion to coat with oil and reduce heat to low. Cook onions slowly until sweet and translucent. Add garlic and zucchini, raise the heat to medium-high, and sauté until zucchini is just tender.

Pour broth and sherry into the pot, raise the heat to high and bring liquid to a boil. Add tortellini, stir well, reduce heat to low and simmer for 10-15 minutes, until tortellini are tender. Stir in tomatoes and basil, simmer 5 minutes. Serve hot with choice of toppings.

Tricks and Tips

Saffron is a very expensive spice. Splurge if you are making saffron risotto, but in a recipe with more flavors, the lesser quality and almost affordable saffron found in grocery stores will do just fine! Infusing both the oil and the broth with saffron, increases the depth and complexity of the flavor.

Tricks and Tips

Adding pasta to soups or stews can be a mushy pasta disaster. Here are a few tricks to help with *Pasta Disaster Prevention*. First, make sure you have more than enough liquid. Next, leave the pasta slightly underdone if the dish will sit before serving. Third, add something to the pasta to cool it off and stop the cooking—or at least slow it. Finally, if time allows, add the pasta just before serving.



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Tricks and Tips

Driving out in the country with Granny was always an adventure. We never knew when we would stop because Granny saw a blackberry bush or wild plum tree growing by the side of the road. A recent trip to Pensacola's Palafox Farmers Market yielded a rare find—three different types of wild plums, just one basket of each. Their flavor ranged from sweet-tart to puckery-tart, but combined they made a tasty spread.

Wild Plum Spread

Regular plums may be substituted by adjusting the amount of sugar added to the strained juice.

Start with 1 cup, stir to dissolve completely and taste. Add more sugar as needed.

Do not alter the recipe's other sugar amounts, to ensure jelling.

INGREDIENTS

6 cups wild plums, washed and picked over
Water to cover
3 cups demerara sugar (regular granulated sugar may be substituted, if necessary)
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1 package low-sugar pectin
1/4 cup demerara sugar
1 cup demerara sugar

DIRECTIONS

Prepare canning jars, lids and rings in a boiling water bath and set aside.
Place plums in deep saucepan with water to cover and simmer covered until plums are tender. Allow to cool, then sieve to remove seeds and skins, pressing as much pulp as possible into the liquid.
Heat liquid to a simmer and stir in 3 cups sugar. Stir occasionally until completely dissolved. Mix in lemon juice and bring to a boil.
Mix pectin powder with 1/4 cup sugar. Whisk into sweetened juice. Bring to a rolling boil and add 1 cup sugar all at once. Stir continuously, return to boil and allow to boil for exactly one minute. Remove from heat.
Pour into prepared hot jars, seal and process. Makes about 6 cups.