

COOKING FRESH



“There can be no local food without local farms.”

A friend stated the obvious one day as we discussed Connecticut’s shrinking farmland. Yes, there are those of us who understand and support the call for local, but it seems like for each one of us, there are many more who just haven’t experienced the pleasures of real food.

Thankfully awareness is growing. Restaurants, stores, schools, clubs, and families have woken up to the seductive taste of local food. Increasingly restaurants like the Firebox in Hartford are opening their doors with the mantra “CT Grown.” Fortunately some like Metro Bis have been supporting their neighbors’ farms for years. The Waterbury Club, Bloomfield Public Schools, and Feast Gourmet Market are others leading the way with local ingredients.

These establishments and many more will gather for the annual Celebration of Connecticut Farms on September 7 at Toplands Farm in Roxbury. Teamed with 35 farms like Laurel Ridge Farm, Stuart Family Farm, Holcomb Farm, they will once again create an outdoor culinary gala like no other in the state. Each year this day of food, wine, beer, and art helps expand support for preserving the Nutmeg State’s farms.

I am grateful that organizations like the Connecticut Farmland Trust, Working Lands Alliance, and others are working hard to save our farms, protect our heritage, and uphold the right to good food.

—John Turenne

For more information on the Celebration of Connecticut Farms, please call the event line at 860.241.0873 or visit www.ctfarmland.org.

WHAT’S FRESH, WHAT’S LOCAL SUMMER 2008

Produce

Apples, Beans—fresh, Beets, Blueberries, Broccoli
Cabbage, Cantaloupe, Carrots, Cherries, Cucumbers, Eggplant,
Garlic, Greens / Lettuce, Herbs, Leeks
Mushrooms (farmed and wild), Nectarines, Onions, Peaches
Peppers, Plums, Potatoes, Raspberries, Spinach
Spring onions—scallions, Strawberries, Summer squashes
Sweet corn, Tomatoes, Watermelon

Meats

Beef, Chicken, Duck, Goose, Turkey

Dairy, etc.

Cheese (cow’s, sheep’s, and goat’s milk), Eggs
Honey, Maple Syrup, Milk

Fish & Shellfish

Blue crabs, Blackfish / Tautog, Bluefish, Clams, Codfish, Conch
Dogfish, Fluke & summer flounder, Hake, Lobster, Monkfish
Oysters, Porgy / Scup, Royal Red shrimp, Sea bass, Sea scallops,
Skate, Squid, Whiting

Photographs: Carole Topalian

PICKLED ZUCCHINI AND SUMMER SQUASH

Courtesy of Chef Chris Prospero, Metro Bis, Simsbury, www.metrobis.com

I have been on a never-ending quest to make the Great American Sandwich ever since I became a chef. I like to start with classic sliced turkey on toasted bread as a base and then I toss on everything I can find, such as lettuce, tomato, sliced onion, cheese, and some kind of dressing. When I take the first bite I always feel like I'm missing something no matter what I have stuffed between the bread. That's when I think about the homemade pickled garden vegetables that my mother preserved each summer. They add that little spark that makes any ordinary sandwich a hit. In this recipe I use one medium zucchini and one medium yellow squash for color. Heat the pickling juice up and pour it over the squash. Within five minutes you can start eating. It also makes a great condiment for grilled meat or fish.

- 1 medium zucchini, sliced into rounds
- 1 medium summer squash, sliced into rounds
- ¼ cup sliced red onion
- 5–6 sprigs fresh dill
- 1 cup white vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup water
- 1 tablespoon pickling spice

Place the squash slices, red onion, and dill in a medium bowl or glass container. Combine the vinegar, sugar, water, and pickling spices in a small pot and bring to a simmer. Turn off and let cool slightly. Pour the mixture over the squash and let sit for 5–10 minutes. Use right away for a warm pickle or refrigerate for up to 2 weeks for a cold pickle.

Makes 1 quart

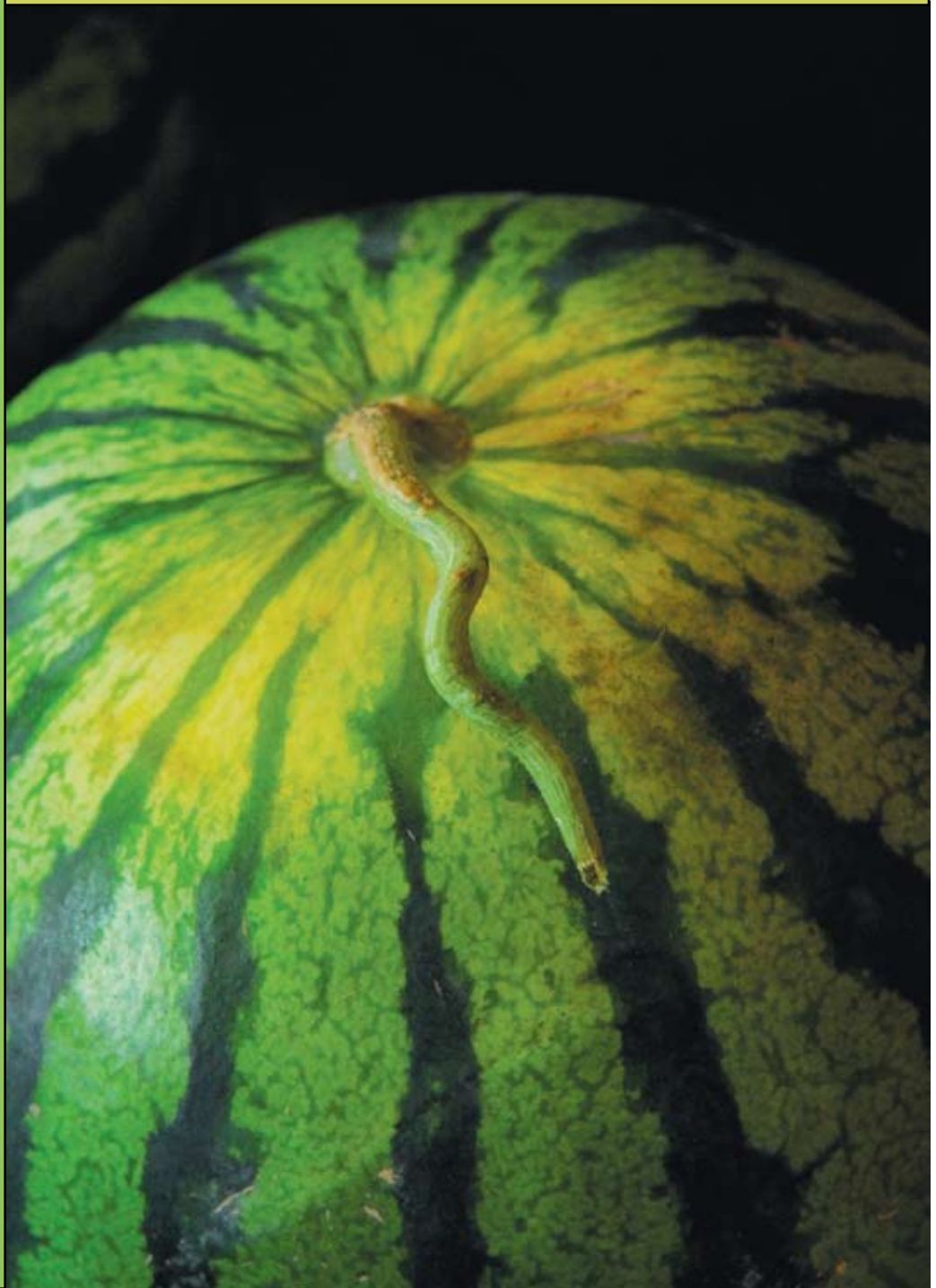
WATERMELON GAZPACHO

Courtesy of Chef Timothy Cipriano, Local Food Dude, www.localfooddude.com

- 1½ quarts watermelon, seedless, chopped
- 1 quart tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- ½ cup red onion, small dice
- 1 each jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped
- 3 cups cucumber, seeded, peeled, and chopped
- ½ cup green pepper, seeded and chopped
- 2 tablespoons cilantro, chopped

Mix all ingredients together in a mixing bowl. Chill for two hours. Serve cold, garnished with sprig of cilantro.

Makes about 3½ quarts



PANZANELLA

Courtesy of Chef Chris Prospero, Metro Bis, Simsbury, www.metrobis.com

Start with a variety of tomatoes to create the two cups, toasted croutons (you can even use store-bought ones), red onion, fresh basil, and feta cheese. The recipe for the dressing will make more than you need and is great on a tossed salad the next day.

- 2 cups chopped tomatoes, 1-inch cubes
- 2 cups croutons
- ½ cup thinly sliced red onion
- 12 large basil leaves, chopped
- ½ cup feta cheese, crumbled
- 2 tablespoons capers—optional
- 4–6 tablespoons dressing
- 1 head romaine heart lettuce, sliced thinly

In a large mixing bowl combine the chopped tomatoes, croutons, red onion, basil, crumbled feta cheese, and capers. Then toss with 4 tablespoons dressing and taste. Add more dressing if necessary, up to 6 tablespoons. Arrange sliced romaine lettuce on the bottom of a large platter. Top with tossed panzanella and serve.

Serves 4–6

Dressing:

- 1 tablespoon chopped garlic
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 6 large basil leaves
- 1 cup olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

Place garlic, Dijon mustard, egg yolks, capers, Worcestershire sauce, balsamic vinegar, and basil leaves in the beaker of a blender. Then while the blender is running, drizzle the oil in a slow steady stream. Season with black pepper and reserve. Keeps for up to one week in the refrigerator.

LOCALLY GROWN SUMMER SALAD

WITH SPICY PECANS, AGED BLUE CHEESE, FRESH BERRIES, AND MAPLE-BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE

Courtesy of Chef Mike Truss, the Waterbury Club, Waterbury, www.waterburyclub.com

For the salad:

- 1 pound locally grown spring mix
- ½ pint strawberries
- ½ pint blackberries
- ½ pint blueberries
- 1 red onion, peeled and thinly sliced
- 8 ounces Black Ledge aged blue cheese
- Salt and cracked black pepper to taste

For the spicy pecans:

- 1 quart water
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ½ cup pure CT maple syrup
- 8 ounces pecans, whole or pieces
- Salt and pepper

For the vinaigrette:

- ¼ cup pure CT maple syrup
- 1 cup organic extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup aged balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper

Make the spicy pecans first, as they take the most time to prepare. Dissolve the sugar in the water and bring to a boil. Add

pecans and reduce to a simmer for 10 minutes. Remove pecans from water and drain. In a bowl, mix together the pure Connecticut maple syrup, cayenne pepper, salt, and pepper evenly. Add pecans and mix thoroughly. Bake on a sheet pan at 350 ° for 20 to 30 minutes, stirring and rotating every five minutes, until golden brown. Let nuts cool at room temperature with the baking sheet on a wire rack.

The vinaigrette can be made in a large bowl. Add the aged balsamic vinegar and pure Connecticut maple syrup while whisking together. Slowly add your organic extra-virgin olive oil until totally incorporated. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Toss the locally grown spring mix greens with the slivered red onion and some of the vinaigrette. Use the amount of vinaigrette you desire, there will be extra. Garnish the salad with crumbled Black Ledge blue cheese, fresh berries, and spicy pecans. Divide these items evenly and season lightly with kosher salt and fresh cracked black pepper.

Serves 4 as an entrée



GRILLED PIZZA WITH SEA SCALLOPS

Courtesy of John Turenne, Sustainable Food Systems, www.sustainablefoodsystms.com

I prefer to use hardwood lump charcoal as it burns much hotter than conventional briquettes or gas and infuses a better flavor. If you don't have that option, you can still follow this recipe with good results.

—John Turenne

- 2 four-ounce balls of pizza dough, homemade or pre-made
- 8 ounces sea scallops
- 3 tablespoons crème fraiche (or sour cream)
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons fresh tarragon, chopped
- 2 ounces blue cheese, finely crumbled
- Kosher sea salt and fresh cracked peppercorns to taste

Allow dough to sit at room temperature and proof until doubled in size.

Preheat grill allowing for a direct heat side and an indirect or 'cooler' side. Prepare your toppings at this point. Mix crème fraiche and mustard. Carefully grill the scallops, using a fine grill rack, then cool and slice about ¼ inch thick and set aside.

When the dough has risen, gently press down into a disk shape, then lift by the sides and turn the disks so their own weight stretches them. When the disks are about 6 or 7 inches in diameter place the dough over the direct heat on the grill and allow them to toast to a medium brown crust underneath. Carefully flip them with tongs and arrange the grilled sliced scallops across the tops in one layer. Drizzle with the crème fraiche, sprinkle with blue cheese and chopped tarragon. Move pizzas to indirect part of the grill. Cover and let 'bake' for about 3 minutes.

Remove from grill. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Makes 2 six-inch pizzas

ASIAN BEEF KABOBS

Courtesy of Mike Lee, Pit master of the Yankee Barbeque Boys Competition Cooking Team, www.yankeebarbeque.com

This recipe won First Place at the CT State BBQ Championships in Lime Rock on May 26, 2007. The Yankee BBQ team has been a regular at the annual Celebration of CT Farms, where they've teamed up with Laurel Ridge and Four Mile River Farms to smoke 'melt in your mouth' beef brisket.

—John Turenne

- 1 pound sirloin tips cut into 1½-inch cubes, salt and pepper to taste
- 4 pairs bamboo skewers, soaked in water

Marinade/Sauce:

- 1 tablespoon Hoisin sauce
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon Thai chili sauce
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 3 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ginger paste
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 green onions, chopped fine

In a non-reactive bowl, combine all marinade ingredients using a whisk. Add beef cubes and toss to cover thoroughly. Cover with plastic wrap and let beef marinate for at least six hours in the refrigerator.

Remove beef cubes from marinade and skewer pieces, approximately 4 per skewer using 2 skewers per kabob. Allow to rest at room temperature for ½ hour.

Add the remainder of marinade to a saucepan and heat until it bubbles then remove from heat source.

Pre-heat grill to a medium-high temperature. Cook kabobs on grill while turning skewers every couple of minutes. Baste kabobs with the hot marinade/sauce during the grilling process. Approximate cooking time: 10 minutes or until medium rare.

Serve with your favorite veggie and starch.
Serves 4

