



COOKING WITH THE SEASONS

ONTARIO-GROWN SPRING PRODUCE

FRUITS

March and April: Apples, rhubarb (forced)

May: Apples, rhubarb (field)

VEGETABLES

March: Baby greens (greenhouse), beets, cabbage, carrots, cucumber (greenhouse), fresh herbs (greenhouse), lettuce (greenhouse), mushrooms, onions, parsnips, potatoes, rutabaga, sprouts, tomatoes (greenhouse)

April: Baby greens (greenhouse), beets, cabbage, carrots, cucumber (greenhouse), fiddleheads, fresh herbs (greenhouse), lettuce (greenhouse), mushrooms, onions, parsnips, rutabaga, sprouts, tomatoes (greenhouse)

May: Asparagus, baby greens (greenhouse), carrots, cucumber (greenhouse), fiddleheads, lettuce (greenhouse), mushrooms, onions, sweet peppers (greenhouse), radishes, ramps, rutabaga, spinach, sprouts, tomatoes (greenhouse)

Ramps (wild leeks)

CHEDDAR ALE SOUP

This soup is perfect for one of those spring days when there's still a little nip in the air. It's thick and hearty and, along with a sandwich filled with local *charcuterie* or a salad of fresh Ontario spring greens and some crusty artisanal bread, makes for a great, easy lunch or dinner. This recipe has been adapted from one that was published in the Winter 2008 issue of *Edible Green Mountains*, and was created by Chef Courtney Contos, the director of culinary activities at the Inn at Essex in Essex, Vermont.

Be sure to use a fine aged Ontario cheddar and a great ale from one of Ontario's many microbreweries when making this soup.

Makes 6 servings

2 tbsp	unsalted butter or extra virgin olive oil
1	large onion, finely diced
1	medium carrot, cut into ¼-inch dice
1	stalk celery, cut into ¼-inch dice
2	cloves garlic, minced
2	bay leaves
1/3 cup	all-purpose flour
2 cups	whole milk
1 ¾ cups	chicken broth
1 ½ cups	ale or beer
1 tbsp	Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp	dry mustard
1 tsp	kosher salt
1/4 tsp	freshly ground black pepper
1 pound	extra-old cheddar, grated
4	strips bacon, cooked and crumbled, or 2 tbsp finely chopped chives or parsley, optional
1/4 cup	maple syrup, optional

In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, celery, garlic and bay leaves and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables begin to soften, about 5 minutes. Decrease the heat to medium-low and sprinkle the flour over the vegetables. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 3 minutes.

Whisk in the milk, broth and ale in a steady stream. Cook, whisking occasionally, for 5 minutes. Stir in the Worcestershire sauce, mustard, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil.

Decrease the heat to low. Add the cheese by handfuls, stirring constantly, and cook until the cheese is melted, about 3 to 4 minutes (do not boil). Discard the bay leaves. Sprinkle with bacon (if using). Serve hot, with maple syrup at the table for drizzling, if desired.



SEARED WHITEFISH WITH MUSSELS AND FIDDLEHEADS

From Gail's Kitchen

Ontario whitefish is at its prime during the spring, when the waters are still cold from the long winter. I like to buy my whitefish from Andrew Akiwenzie of Akiwenzie's Fish & More, who sells the whitefish he caught the previous day at several farmers' markets in Toronto.

I adapted this from a recipe for seared pollock with mussels and Brussels sprout leaves that appeared in the Winter 2007 issue of *Edible Rhody*.

Makes 4 servings

1/2 pound	fiddleheads, cleaned as directed on page 20
1 pound	fresh mussels, beards removed and scrubbed well
1 cup	dry white wine
3 sprigs	fresh thyme
2 cloves	garlic, thinly sliced
1	shallot, thinly sliced
2 tbsp	whipping cream
6 tbsp	cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes
1 tbsp	finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 tsp	freshly squeezed lemon juice, if needed
4	whitefish filets (6 to 8 ounces each), skin on, or other firm-fleshed fish
1 tsp	kosher salt, plus more if needed
1/4 tsp	freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp	grapeseed oil

Have a large bowl of ice water ready. In a medium pot of boiling salted water, cook the fiddleheads until crisp-tender, about 8 to 10 minutes. Drain the fiddleheads, then plunge them into the ice water. After 1 minute, remove the fiddleheads from the ice water and drain again; set aside.

In a large saucepan, combine the mussels, wine, thyme, garlic and shallot. Cover the pot and bring the liquid to a boil. Cook until the mussels have opened, about 4 to 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove the mussels to a large plate, discarding any unopened mussels. Remove the mussels from their shells; discard the shells and set the mussels aside. Strain the cooking liquid through a fine-mesh strainer into a small saucepan; discard the solids. Cook the liquid over medium-high heat until it is reduced to about 1/4 cup (4 tablespoons), about 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat. Whisk in the butter, about 1 tablespoon at a time, adding another portion of butter only after the first has melted. Stir in the parsley. Taste the sauce and add lemon juice and/or salt as needed; cover the pan and set aside.

Pat the whitefish dry. Sprinkle evenly with the salt and pepper. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Place the fish filets skin side-up in the pan. Allow the fish to cook until the flesh is brown and crisp and the filets no longer stick to the pan, about 3 minutes. Carefully turn over each filet and cook until the skin is brown and crisp and the fish is just barely cooked through, about 2 to 3 minutes.

When the fish is almost finished cooking, add the cooked fiddleheads and mussels to the sauce in the saucepan. Heat very gently over medium-low heat for about 2 minutes. Place each fish filet on a plate. Spoon the sauce, fiddleheads and mussels evenly around each filet. Serve immediately.



Andrew Akiwenzie displaying a whitefish filet from his previous day's catch in Georgian Bay

Photo by Gail Gordon Oliver

ELK STEAKS WITH RED WINE SAUCE

From Gail's Kitchen

Elk is a wonderfully flavourful meat that is quite low in fat and contains slightly lower levels of cholesterol than most other red meats. This is a very simple yet elegant preparation. Elk is very lean, so take care not to cook it beyond medium-rare or you'll risk toughening up the meat.

- 4 Ontario elk steaks or medallions (about ½ pound each)
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt, plus more if needed
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper, plus more if needed
- 2 tbsp grapeseed oil
- 2 shallots or ½ small onion, minced
- 1 cup dry red wine
- 1/2 cup beef or chicken broth
- 1 tbsp grainy mustard
- 2 tbsp red currant jelly
- 3 tbsp cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

Pat the elk steaks dry. Sprinkle evenly with the salt and pepper. In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the steaks and allow them to cook until a nice brown crust develops and the steaks no longer stick to the pan, about 3 minutes. Turn the steaks and continue to cook to medium-rare, about 2 minutes. Remove the steaks to a plate; set aside to rest.

Reduce the heat to medium. In the same pan, add the shallots. Cook, stirring, about 2 minutes. Add the red wine, increase the heat to medium-high and cook, scraping up the brown bits from the bottom of the pan, until the wine is reduced by about two-thirds, about 3 minutes. Whisk in the broth, mustard and red currant jelly. Bring to a boil and cook until reduced slightly, about 2 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat.

Whisk in the butter, 2 or 3 cubes at a time, adding another portion of butter only after the first has melted. Taste the sauce and add salt and pepper as needed. Slice the steaks across the grain to the desired thickness. Spoon the sauce evenly over or around the steaks and serve immediately.






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