



Edible Paradise: Fresh Picks at the Market

By Andrew Cohen, MBCFM Chef In Residence

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■ **Featured Produce:** *Early Fall Produce*

■ **Recipes:** *Pumpkin Soup, Chipotle Crème Fraîche, Gingered Parsnip Soup, Tomato Liquor*

I sometimes teach cooking at my kid's school, which means I am talking to kindergartners through 8th graders, and their parents as well. Part of the cooking lesson involves nutrition and diet. After a few years of this I have distilled the message to, "Eat as close to the ground as you can and eat as many colors as you can in one day." And then I add the admonishment, "And I am not talking about the colors in a Skittles pack or M&Ms!"

When I say, "Eat as close to the ground as you can" I mean eat things that are as processed as little as possible, are close to their natural form, have as few chemicals added as you can find. I am not suggesting a raw diet, but I do think that food with more than three things added that I can't pronounce are things I prefer to avoid.

When I say, "Eat as many colors as you can in one day" I mean just that. It is always fun to go through foods and colors with kids and see what they come up with. The purpose behind this statement is to encourage eating a variety of foods to deliver the widest range of nutrients for better health, and to encourage kids to be open to more foods. I think adults benefit from this as well.

There is much talk of antioxidants and bioflavonoids these days. The best way to get these is to eat close to the ground, and eat as many colors as you can. This is a great time of the year to do just that, with the market being at its most colorful. Peppers, eggplants, lettuces and herbs, berries, tomatoes, stonefruit and apples, squash, beans, potatoes, and even the mushrooms – are all there adding color. I love this time of year for cooking with the cold season foods mixing in with the summer produce.

This is also a good time to think about putting some of these colorful foods up for later in the year. If you can or do preserves, now seems to be the time. If you are like me and find time lacking, you can do simpler things like roast peppers and bag them and freeze them, or make tomato "liquor" and reduce it down to freeze.

Roasted Peppers for Wintertime

To save peppers, you need to roast them first. For this, thick walled peppers are best. Pick out the ones you want, then put them into a large bowl. Pour some oil on them and rub to evenly coat. Put the peppers on a sheet pan with a lip and put under the pre-heated broiler 3 to 4 inches away. When the peppers blacken on the one side, use tongs to turn the peppers to evenly char them all over. You can use a barbecue, open flame, or I even use a propane torch for a few peppers. Once the peppers are evenly charred, transfer to the bowl and cover with a tight lid or plastic wrap so the peppers steam. As soon as the peppers cool enough to be handled, pull off the skin and use a sharp knife to open the peppers and scrape away the seeds and white ribs. If your peppers are hot, you might want to wear rubber gloves, and you do not want to touch your face! Once all the peppers are seeded and scraped, they can be stacked and slipped into plastic bags and then frozen for use in the winter.

Chestnuts

Root vegetables are starting to appear amidst the stalls, and one of my favorite foods is now here too—chestnuts! I like to prepare bags of these and put them in the freezer as well. I use an adjustable utility knife with the blade out half way. I then make a cut around the rim of the nut. Imagine a clam—now see a chestnut—the cut is the same as the opening of a clam, except I follow the rim at its furthest point out, not where it is half way. I check that the cut has gone through the inner shell as well as the outer, and then I toss them into a bowl of cold water for a couple minutes. Put them on a heavy sheet pan in a pre-heated 400F° for around 10-12 minutes or until the shells feel crisped and are curling away from the nut. Remove from the oven and cover with a towel. Peel as soon as you can hold the nuts without burning yourself. If they do not peel easily, leave them. When you have peeled all the easy ones, put the recalcitrant ones back in the oven for five minutes and repeat. I do this each week, freezing some and eating the rest. Sometimes I just roast and eat them as is, or I add them to dishes such as roast fowl or braises.

Try sautéing an onion and a couple carrots cut into rounds, then adding some cabbage. Cook just to start the softening process. Add a handful of peeled chestnuts; some slices of Mutsu apples, and some

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thick pork chops. A German sausage from Corralitos meats would add a nice smokey aroma to this. Then, add some stock and wine such as gewürztraminer or riesling to come about halfway up. Bake covered at 350F° for about an hour or until the pork is done and the cabbage in tender.

The following soup recipes and gratin recipe are easy to use with other vegetables of the same type.

Butternut Squash Gratin

(1) Peel a butternut squash and cut into cubes, ½ inch to 1 inch as long as they are consistent.

(2) Toss in olive oil.

(3) Rub a gratin dish with a peeled garlic clove and then lightly oil the dish.

(4) Put the squash into the dish, sprinkle lightly with flour and S&P. Toss some herbs such as sage or oregano over it and maybe drizzle a little more olive oil.

(5) Bake in a 350°F oven for one hour or until the squash is tender and caramelizing on the edges. Ten minutes before it is done, scatter minced garlic over the whole thing, or cheese, or seasoned breadcrumbs. Serve hot.

You can do this with pumpkin as well as other firm squash.

Another well-documented source of antioxidants is tea. Here at the Farmers Market we have an excellent tea vendor: Malabar Trading Company. You will find premium black, rare olongs, white, and green loose leaf teas here, as well as many herbal “teas” (known as “tisanes”) that are packed with antioxidants. Green and white teas are both drunk for health as well as pleasure, and rooibos, while not a tea per se, is also loaded with antioxidants and is said to have a calming effect. Stop by and say hi, taste the chai, and ask questions.

I like organic produce not just because I like the taste, but I also feel it is more nutritious for you, and better for the Earth. Cancer and diabetes seem on the increase, and although I’m not a doctor, I cannot help but wonder how environmental factors and diet impact our health. We are what we eat. At our farmers market we have so many great things to choose from, from organic produce to organic meats. Why not eat sensibly and nutritiously?

If seem to be on a bit of a health rant, forgive me—last month was kind of hard. This article is dedicated to Wayne Coleman and Stephen Plager, two men of grace and giving who left our realm too soon.

Be kind, eat well, see you around the market.

Pumpkin Soup

1 pumpkin, 10 - 12 inches in diameter

1 onion, sliced fine

1 clove garlic, minced

4 cups mushroom stock

Salt and pepper

Olive oil

1 tablespoon butter

Cut pumpkin into quarters. Oil each piece and roast in a pre heated 400°F oven until it softens and you can smell sugars.

Cool pumpkin and remove skin.

Sauté onion and garlic in butter until clear. Add pumpkin and cook 5 minutes more. Add stock, bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook until softened.

Add salt and pepper, then puree and strain through a fine strainer. Adjust seasoning and serve.

Some Great Variations

- Use a dry sherry to lift the flavors.
- Use curry powder when sautéing the onion and garlic.
- Use other squashes such as delicata and/or kabocha, etc.
- Serve with a crouton with melted Brie floating in the soup.
- Garnish with a drizzle of toasted pumpkinseed oil and crushed pumpkinseeds.
- Garnish with a fried onion frizz or garlic chips.
- Season with cumin and coriander seed and add cilantro. Top with chipotle crema.

Chipotle Crema

1/2 cup crème fraîche

1 tablespoon chipotle en adobo (chile and adobo blended)

Lime juice to thin and flavor

Fresh ground coriander seed, 1 medium pinch (approx 1/4 teaspoon)

Mix the crème fraîche and chipotle and stir in well. Add the coriander seed and mix.

Add in lime juice a little at a time. Taste for balance and check for consistency. OJ can be used as well or instead of lime juice.

Storing in plastic squeeze bottles is fun for garnishing purposes. These are available at most beauty shop supply houses. I put plastic wrap between the bottle and the cap to keep the funk outta the nozzle, and I also cap the top.

Gingered Parsnip Soup

3 medium leeks, sliced fine

6 medium parsnips, tender, chopped medium

2 cloves garlic, sliced fine

3 medium potatoes, peeled and sliced ¼ inch

4 “nickels” of ginger, minced

1 cup white wine

2 cups. vegetable stock

1 bay leaf

Salt and white pepper

Water

In a soup pot, sauté leeks and parsnips in a little oil or butter until tender. Add the garlic and ginger, then the thyme. Soften these items.

Add the potatoes. Add the wine, bring to a boil and reduce by 80%.

Add the stock; cook until everything is soft. Season with salt and white pepper. Puree in blender, and strain back into pot. Thin to desired consistency with water.

Garnish with a streak of yogurt and chervil or mint.