



Edible Paradise: Fresh Picks at the Market

By Andrew Cohen, MBCFM Chef In Residence

May 2007

■ **Featured Produce:** *Burdock Root and Haricots Verts*

■ **Recipes:** *Basic Burdock and Salsify, Haricots Verts Salad*

It looks like winter is now over and many of the familiar warm weather crops are starting to show up again. There are also some less familiar ones to be found around the market as well. As an example, I give you burdock root, also known as gobo to many.

In America, this root is most frequently found in futo-maki sushi, or salmon skin rolls, as the thin crunchy orange pickle with the taste that is so hard to describe. In its natural state, it is an ugly rough skinned root that looks like an anemic carrot without much taper that is in dire need of a good scrubbing. At the market, you can find them at Tom and Lori Coke's stand in a box on the table in front of Tom. They range in size from pencil thin to Hi-liter marker thick, and are about 4 to 7 inches in length. Look for firmer roots and check the ends for the little holes that tell you there may be some pithiness in the center of the vegetable.

Like salsify and artichokes, when you cut burdock, it will start to brown. Have a bowl of water ready that has the juice of half a lemon in it, and drop the burdock into it as you finish peeling and cutting each piece. Traditional Japanese cooking uses rice vinegar in lieu of lemon, about 1 teaspoon per 4 cups of water. Also like salsify, burdock has an artichoke like flavor to it along with a nuttiness that is quite nice, but it also is "rootier" tasting. Where salsify and artichokes hum their flavor, burdock whistles in a higher register. It is a more assertive vegetable that maintains some crunch and succulence even after cooking, and is great in combination with other flavors.

Whole grains would show up the nuttiness and would benefit from burdock's top notes, adding interest to what can be a bland dish to many folks. I think cooked burdock added into a sauté of maitake mushrooms from Ken and Sandra at New Natives would be a remarkable dish of powerful, complementary flavors.

After cooking the burdock as described, cut it into matchsticks, and then sauté maitake in a little butter and oil until softened and starting to crisp on the edges. Add the burdock and give a toss and

warm them up. Add a shot of mirin (sweet Japanese cooking sake), then a little soy sauce. Add a little ginger juice (get this by grating peeled ginger on a microplane or fine grater, then simply squeeze the juice out over the dish), a touch of salt and fresh ground pepper, and serve with greens, grains, or even fish.

The following is a basic burdock recipe that yields the vegetable ready for finishing in other dishes. Although edible as is, I find it does best with other flavors to round it out. This recipe will give you salsify that is ready to eat right from the pan. Tom and Lori sometimes bring both salsify and black salsify (scorzoneria) to market as well, and if it's available, you really should give it a try.

BASIC BURDOCK AND SALSIFY

Juice of half lemon

1/2 lb. burdock root

2 cups stock (vegetable or chicken, or a combination of stock and water)

1 clove of garlic, peeled, split, and de-germed

1 good-sized sprig of thyme

- (1) Add the lemon juice to just enough water to hold the burdock when peeled and cut.
- (2) Peel the burdock and cut into 2 1/2 inch long pieces. Drop these into the acidulated water.
- (3) Put the stock into a saucepan that will hold the burdock without them getting lost. Add the garlic and thyme, then the burdock. Pour in half the lemon water, or just add a fresh squeezing of juice from the other half lemon.
- (4) Bring the pan to a boil, and then reduce the heat to simmer. Cook 20 to 30 minutes or until the burdock is tender. (Salsify is less predictable and requires more frequent checking. It goes from almost done to mush in minutes. Gently simmer and start checking after 15 minutes.) Remove the vegetables from the pan when tender, and reduce any remaining liquid to form a light glaze.
- (5) Return the vegetables to the pan and toss to coat. At this point,

[Continued page 2]

Andrew Cohen's culinary career spans over thirty years. A graduate from the esteemed California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, Andrew interned at Chez Parnisse with celebrity chef Alice Waters. Chef Andrew writes a monthly column for the Monterey Bay Certified Farmers Market newsletter, Edible Paradise and is a featured columnist for the Santa Cruz Sentinel. To sign up for the free newsletter, go to www.montereybayfarmers.org.

salsify is ready to eat as is, and burdock is ready to go into a dish with other ingredients. Salsify would go well with fish, chicken, artichokes, asparagus, or a combination of the above. Burdock pairs well with whole grains and mushrooms.

There are many recipes for burdock in Japanese cuisine. Look for them under *gobo*. There is a history of burdock being used medicinally in both western and traditional Chinese medicine.

HARICOTS VERTS

Going from ugly and gnarled to smooth and delicate, haricots verts are in season again. Also known as filet beans, they are not baby green beans, but a bean that is meant to eaten when small. If they are not utilized when small, they turn fibrous and the taste is not pleasant. Keep in mind they are picked by hand, so a pound of these is 2-3 times the work of harvesting the larger green beans. I love these for the sweeter, deeper flavor they have. I just line them up and take off the tops, and then cook them in well-salted water. When they are done, I drain them and drizzle a little extra virgin olive oil on them with some coarse salt, and sometimes a touch of good balsamic vinegar. They also go well with a little hazelnut oil, or shallots sautéed in butter.

For a change of pace, make a salad with them that uses vinegar and a little lightly whipped cream instead of the usual oil and vinegar.

SALAD OF HARICOTS VERTS

1/2 lb. haricots verts

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar or sherry vinegar

1 teaspoon finely minced shallot

1/2 teaspoon finely minced thyme

A pinch of kosher salt

Fresh ground black pepper to taste

3-4 oz. heavy whipping cream

- (1) Top and tail the beans, and cut into 2 inch lengths.
- (2) Blanch the beans in a large pot of salted water until just done, about 3 to 5 minutes. Drain and dump the beans into ice water to immediately arrest the cooking. When cold, drain and dry, then set aside.
- (3) Add the shallot, thyme, and salt and pepper, to the vinegar. Allow to macerate 5-10 minutes for flavors to infuse the vinegar.
- (4) In a separate, non-reactive bowl, whip the cream until it starts to thicken and the whisk begins to leave a trail in the bottom of the bowl. Drizzle in the vinegar and seasoning, gently whisking all the while.
- (5 (1)) When ready to serve, dress the beans with just enough dressing to coat the beans.

Variation: Make a salad with soft whole butter lettuce leaves and chopped hazelnuts, or with young arugula and a scattering of diced

heirloom tomatoes. Using some of the sprout mix from New Natives is a nice way to go also.