



Edible Paradise: Fresh Picks at the Market

By Andrew Cohen, MBCFM Chef In Residence

June 2007

■ **Featured Produce:** *Fresh Herbs*

■ **Recipes:** *Tapenade, Chef Andrew's Pesto, Zucchini Jam, Salsa Verde, Charmoule, Herbed Chicken Paillards*

Strolling the market last week, I noticed a lot more color in the stalls and the air was fragrant with ripe fruit and fresh herbs. At KT Farms, there were four types of basil—large and small leafed Italian basil, Thai basil, and “hot” basil. The hot basil had a distinctive clove flavor to it. I thought it would be great in a soup such as a Vietnamese pho. Looking down I spotted a box of Japanese eggplants that hadn't been put out yet, but they were so busy I didn't have the heart to ask them to let me at 'em.

At Bar-D I saw some zucchini which reminded me of their Butterstick zucchini. I love the bright yellow color in combination with the green zucchini. At Nagamine Farms I saw more basil, including the seductive purple basil. The basil, mint, catnip, thyme and marjoram all lent a great herbaceous perfume to the air, which helped to crank up the cooking part of my brain at that early hour. Spying the tomatoes they also had on hand made me think of ratatouille. It wasn't until I was standing in front of Blue Heron Farms staring at the radishes that I realized there are no peppers yet, so the ratatouille will have to wait.

While contemplating the bounty of fresh ingredients at hand, I began to think of making an assortment of condiments—pots of gold I can stock the refrigerator with to enhance a dish or meal. Preoccupied, I arrived at Valencia Creek Farms booth and told Chris Banthien I was daydreaming about zucchini jam and tapenade. Chris nodded knowingly and shared, “Having those sorts of things on hand always make me feel rich.”

With just a few jars of “jams” or savory condiments on hand, you can put together flavorful meals on the fly. You can use these as marinades, toppings, sauce bases or sauces, pizza toppings, or just smears on bread or crackers for a snack. By investing a little time on a leisurely Sunday morning, it's easy to turn out several of these items and have time savers for a month.

We are blessed at the Aptos farmers market to have access to not one, but two, local organic olive oil producers. I love using olive oil in condiments that showcase the rich flavor of olive oil. Marguerite Remde of Belle Farms has samples of her delicious olive oil for tasting at market now, and Chris Banthien from Valencia Creek Farms is back at the market as well with her award winning olive oil. Both of these producers' olive oils have distinctive flavors and are excellent for finishing dishes or using in things like pesto or tapenade, for which the recipes follow.

I make tapenade with either green or black olives (never both) and am a purist about it—tapenade is capers, olives, garlic, herbs, and oil. It is great as a marinade for meat such as lamb or beef, or you can top fish with it (it's an excellent companion for salmon), or use it as a quick pasta sauce. (Drain the pasta and save a couple tablespoons of the cooking water in the pan, lob in a couple tablespoons of tapenade and stir well, then add the pasta back in. *Voila!*) Tapenade finds its way into salad dressings, mayonnaise, and onto pizza. Spread it on sandwiches or toasts. Use it to marinate tofu or toss with chickpeas for a quick salad as well. I find green olives to be zippier. I use lemon in the summer and red wine vinegar in winter. For lemons, I like to use Meyer lemons for the sweetness and floral qualities they provide.

TAPENADE

1 1/2 cups olives, pitted (black or green, oil cured or brined)

2 medium cloves garlic, peeled and chopped

1 heaping tablespoon capers (preferably salted), rinsed and chopped

1 teaspoon finely minced thyme, marjoram, and/or summer savory (1 teaspoon total)

1 or 2 boned fillets of anchovy (optional)

Extra virgin olive oil, as needed

1-2 tablespoons red wine vinegar or lemon juice, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper (about 10 turns of the mill)

Salt, if needed

(1) Place solid ingredients in food processor and process until a paste begins to form. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and pepper. Pulse two or

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three times to mix, taste, and then add vinegar or lemon juice to taste.

(2) Use olive oil to loosen mixture to a barely loose paste. The tapenade should have a balance of fruitiness, salt, herbs and acid.

By the way, don't try this with martini olives or canned Mission olives. Tapenade keeps quite well in the refrigerator for many weeks.

PESTO

Historically, pesto is made with walnuts as or pine nuts. I use roasted almonds like you find at the market from Stackhouse and Minazzoli farms. I like the smoother, mellower flavor that almonds give the pesto. Flat leaf parsley is also used sometimes. Italian pesto tends to be less garlicky than what is found in America. Besides using pesto for pasta, I use it on sandwiches, as a topping for fish, and a flavoring in vegetable soups. It is great to toss into the sauté pan just as the shrimp finish.

I like to use a mortar and pestle instead of a food processor when making pesto. I feel the flavors are brighter and the pesto holds its color longer. Food processors heat the pesto and "cooks" the basil, which helps the discoloration. Also, processor blades dull quickly and rather than making a clean cut to the basil they smash it, speeding up oxidization.

Whatever you do, when storing pesto in the refrigerator, make sure the herbs are below the surface of the oil to prevent oxidation.

CHEF ANDREW'S PESTO

1 large pinch of coarse salt

40 medium basil leaves (make sure they are dry)

1-2 cloves garlic, peeled, split, and de-germed

3 tablespoons roasted almonds (or pine nuts, or a combination)

*2-3 tablespoons freshly grated Pecorino Romano**

2-4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

(1) In a large mortar, add the salt and five of the basil leaves. Grind them firmly but gently with a circular motion against the sides and bottom of the mortar until they start to break down. Keep adding a few leaves at a time until they are all in, but not thoroughly destroyed.

(2) Add the garlic, and mash down on it directly with the pestle to crush it. Then proceed with the grinding. When the garlic is pulverized and the juices have been amalgamated into the basil, add the nuts a few at a time and crush them up before adding the next few. When they are all in, grind to a uniform consistency.

(3) Add the cheese and mix everything together well. Begin adding the olive oil in a steady stream and mixing with the pestle to achieve a creamy consistency. Add enough oil so the pesto moves a bit like a sauce, rather than being a stiff paste. The color should be bright and the ingredients well amalgamated.

* You can also use Parmigiano-Reggiano or some of each, but I prefer the Pecorino as it is typically a little less assertive.

The technique for making savory "jam" is simple, and can be applied to many different vegetables. You might be surprised at what you can use- onions, fennel, peppers, eggplant. Try mixing in dried figs, or fresh in season, or even raisins. If the flavors seem a little flat or bitter, add a touch of vinegar or a pinch of sugar to balance the flavor.

ZUCCHINI JAM

2 ribs of celery, medium dice

1/2 medium brown onion, medium dice

3 small-medium zucchini, medium dice

1-2 large clove garlic, minced

1 large tomato, peeled and seeded, diced

Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

5-10 medium basil leaves, chiffonade

Water, stock or wine as needed

Olive oil

(1) Over medium heat, warm a medium sized chefs pan or sauté pan. When the pan is hot, add enough oil to coat the bottom of the pan. When the oil starts to shimmer and move freely in the pan bottom, it is hot enough. Add the celery and onions, and sauté until they are softened and starting to turn golden.

(2) Add the zucchini, and toss to coat with oil. Add a touch more oil if necessary to just coat the zucchini. Continue to cook, coloring the edges of the squash and softening the vegetables, tossing to keep from burning but allowing for caramelization.

(3) Sprinkle the garlic over the contents of the pan, and then toss to mix in. Cook a few more minutes until you smell the garlic.

(4) Add the tomato, and toss to combine. Reduce the heat to low. Sprinkle with a pinch of salt. (This will also help the tomato give up its liquid.) If the contents of the pan seem dry, add a shot of water or stock, or even white wine if you have some sitting around.

(5) Cook, stirring occasionally, to get a jam-like consistency. Add liquid as needed to keep the contents a little loose as the glaze forms. When the "jam" has formed, season with a little salt and the pepper, and taste for balance. If the dish seems a little flat, try adding a splash of vinegar such as sherry, white wine, or white balsamic. Remember—you can always add more! Start with a little, and then add more if needed. If the dish seems a touch on the bitter side, a pinch of sugar will be what is needed to correct the balance.

(6) When the jam has the balance you like, add in the basil chiffonade and stir to evenly combine throughout. Remove the pan from the heat and allow to cool. The residual heat will release the flavors of the basil.

I used this as a "sauce" under some lingcod that I marinated in lemon oil and marjoram for a while before being seared then roasted. Use your imagination for combinations of flavors!

Most salsa verde has shallots, green onion, or alliums of some

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sort. This one doesn't, simply because there weren't any when I was making it, but it does not seem to suffer for that omission. The flavors here are big but fairly nuanced. This works great as a topping for grilled flavorful fish such as sword, halibut, tuna, or salmon. Originally it was used as a condiment for steaks, but it works well on pasta or mixed into Israeli couscous, salad dressing, or smeared onto crostini as a snack. I've used it on deli sandwiches straight or mixed into mayo, and I've even put it into scrambled eggs with veggies and cheese.

SALSA VERDE WITH MINT AND BASIL

1 cup packed mint leaves
1 cup loosely packed Genovese basil
1/2 cup loosely packed oregano leaves
Zest of 2 Meyer lemons
1/2 cup capers, rinsed
1 tablespoon (or a little more as needed) sherry vinegar
2 big pinches of coarse salt
8 grinds (or more) of black pepper
1/4 cup olive oil
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

- (1) Finely mince the first five ingredients and mix together in a non-reactive bowl.
- (2) Add lemon juice and vinegar, S&P, and mix well.
- (3) Stir in the oils to get a balanced mixture—neither soupy nor real “leafy.” Mix slowly, remembering you can always add oil, but it is very hard to extract it. Allow flavors to marry for 15 minutes before use.
- (4) Top with a light film of olive oil and store in the refrigerator for a up to week or two.

CHARMOULA

Use as a marinade for fish, chicken, or meat.
4 cloves of garlic, peeled and de-germed
1/2 cup cilantro small, tender sprigs
1/2 cup flat leaf parsley leaves (some end stems are okay)
2 teaspoons cumin, freshly ground
1-2 teaspoons paprika
Zest of 1 lemon, finely minced
Juice of 1 lemon
1/2 - 2 teaspoons cayenne pepper (how hot do you like it?)
1 cup olive oil

- (1) Put everything in the blender except the olive oil. Puree coarsely.
- (2) Once roughly pureed, stream the oil into the blender in a thin stream with the motor running, just until a thick paste-like texture is achieved.
- (3) Keeps in the refrigerator, tightly sealed, for a week.

HERBED CHICKEN PAILLARDS

6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
4 cloves of garlic, peeled and de-germed
1 cup mint leaves
1 cup basil leaves
1 cup marjoram leaves
1 cup oregano leaves
1/2 cup thyme sprigs
1/2 cup parsley sprigs
1/2 cup rosemary branch tips
1/4 cup tarragon leaves
1 cup lemon juice
1 cup white wine
1/4 cup olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper

- (1) Pound the chicken breasts as thinly as you can without ripping them, and place in a large non-reactive baking dish.
- (2) Mince the garlic and scatter over the chicken.
- (3) Coarsely chop all the herbs together and toss into a bowl. Pour in the liquid and mix well.
- (4) Pour in the oil and mix well. Pour the herb mix onto the chicken and coat the chicken well with the herb mixture.
- (5) Marinate 1- 1½ hours.
- (6) Get the grill very hot, and clean and lubricate the grate really well.
- (7) Lift the chicken out of the marinade and set on paper toweling to dry a little. Leave any herbs still on the chicken alone. Grill the first side until the edges show white. Flip the chicken and get ready to remove them. They will finish cooking in a minute or two.
- (8) Remove from the grill just before the chicken seems done. The carry-over (residual heat still in the meat) will finish the cooking on the way to the table. Serve with wedges of lemon to drizzle over.

This recipe is supposed to feed 6. I find this dish to be very popular, and always make more in the hopes (often in vain . . .) there will be leftovers for a sandwich the next day. It makes a killer sandwich, especially with pesto or salsa verde, and tomatoes.