

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Souvenirs you can eat

When I travel, I seek out farmers markets, local specialties and restaurants that serve locally-sourced food. While I used to be the queen of souvenir t-shirts and mugs, I have given up those doo-dads for Ziplocs filled with local goodies to sample and share when I return home. When I can't bring home the food, I try to snag recipes from willing chefs.

In May, Mom took me on a river cruise that started in Vienna, Austria and traveled the Danube, Main and Rhine Rivers to Basel, Switzerland. On our first evening in Vienna, Christian, our local Uniworld guide, took us to Melker Stiftskeller, a cellar restaurant. The building has been owned by Melk Abbey since 1438 and they used it to store wine for about 600 years. Now the monks rent it out as a restaurant.

The daily menu featured locally-harvested seasonal food. I enjoyed ravioli with bear's garlic (similar to ramps), white asparagus with a delicious vinaigrette and the dessert I split with Mom—a rhubarb crisp with cinnamon ice cream. When I approached our waiter, Sebastian, about asking the chef for the vinaigrette recipe, it turned out Sebastian was not just the waiter, but also the owner and the chef. I shared a copy of Hogtown HomeGrown and he happily shared his recipe to share with you!

Sebastian's Tomato Caper Vinaigrette

INGREDIENTS

3 tomatoes, about a pound
1 cup white or apple cider vinegar
1 Tablespoon Dijon mustard
1/4 teaspoon each salt and finely-ground pepper
1-1 1/2 cups olive oil
1/2 cup red pepper, finely diced
1/2 cup red onion, finely diced
1/4 cup capers, divided

DIRECTIONS

Prepare tomatoes by blanching in boiling water and shocking in ice water. Remove skins, finely chop and set aside in a bowl. Cut tomatoes in half, squeeze seeds into bowl with skins. Finely dice tomato and set aside.

In a large skillet, cook tomato skins and seeds with vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper until reduced by half. Pour into a deep bowl and set aside to cool to room temperature.

Use a whisk to gradually beat olive oil into cooked tomato-vinegar mixture until incorporated. Taste emulsification after adding 1 cup olive oil and whisk in remaining oil as needed to achieve the taste balance desired.

Coarsely chop half the capers and add to emulsification with chopped tomato, red pepper, red onion and whole capers. Taste again and adjust seasoning as needed.

What's Fresh Right Now?

- Beans**—purple/green long, green
- Beets**—red
- Berries**—blueberries, blackberries
- BokChoy**
- Cabbage**—napa
- Carrots**—orange, yellow
- Corn**—triple-sweet
- Cucumbers**—pickling, slicers
- Eggplant**—white/purple/heirloom italian, white/purple/green japanese, fairy tale baby
- Fennel**
- Garlic**—heads, elephant
- Greens**—chard, kale, lemon sorrel, arugula
- Herbs**—mint, garlic chives, sage, oregano, rosemary, italian/purple/lemon/thai/tulsi basil, parsley
- Kohlrabi**—green, purple
- Leeks**
- Lettuce**—green butterhead, romaine
- Moringa**
- Melons**—cantaloupe, watermelon, crenshaw, sun jewel, sugar cube
- Okra**
- Onions**—white/red, sweet
- Peaches**
- Pineapple**
- Peas**—pink/black eye, white acre, zipper, creamer
- Peppers**—red/green/yellow/orange/mini sweet bell, poblano, cayenne, chile, banana, jalapeno, variety hot
- Potatoes**—white, red new, fingerling, purple, sweet
- Shoots, Sprouts and Microgreens**
- Squash**—pattypan, acorn, butternut, kabocha, buttercup, pumpkin, seminole pumpkin
- Tomatoes**—grape, beefsteak, heirloom, cherry, large/small plum, green

Local and Fresh— Thyme

A relative of oregano, thyme may be used fresh or dried—a teaspoon of dried equals three teaspoons of fresh.

Fresh thyme stems may be added to soups and stews and removed before serving. Leaves may be stripped from stems easily by running fingers from bottom to top of stem. Chopped leaves release more oils and increase a dish's flavor, but leaves may be used whole for more subtlety.

Wrap fresh thyme in a paper towel and store refrigerated in a plastic bag.

Thyme-infused Steamed Squash

INGREDIENTS

- 12-18 stems of fresh thyme
- 6-8 yellow summer squash
- Olive oil to taste (optional)
- Sat and freshly-ground pepper to taste (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Use most of the thyme to line the bottom of the steamer basket. Reserve 3 stems.

Trim ends from squash and quarter lengthwise. Lay pieces on top of thyme, skin-side down in one layer.

Steam until just done, but firm. Remove pot from heat, cover and let sit for five minutes.

Place steamed squash in serving bowl. Strip leaves off reserved thyme stems and sprinkle over squash. If desired, drizzle with olive oil and season to taste.

May be served immediately or at room temperature. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

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Tomato Soup a la Chef Milas

INGREDIENTS

3 Tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
1 stalk celery
1 clove garlic, smashed and finely chopped
1 teaspoon dried thyme
2 Tablespoons tomato paste
4-6 medium sized tomatoes, coarsely chopped (about 1 1/2 pounds)
1 quart chicken or no-chicken broth
1 Tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, stripped from stems and coarsely chopped

DIRECTIONS

Heat one tablespoon of butter over medium heat. Add onion and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened. Stir in garlic and thyme.

Make an open spot in the pan for tomato paste and let it sizzle for a minute before stirring all ingredients together.

Add tomatoes, broth and fresh thyme. Stir thoroughly and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes.

Cool slightly and then puree in blender or food processor. Run blended soup through a sieve to remove seeds and skins.

Return soup to pot and bring to a simmer. Add remaining 2 Tablespoons butter with salt and pepper to taste.

CREAM OF TOMATO SOUP

Replace the 2 tablespoons of butter added at the end of cooking with 1/4 cup cream.

Herbed Grilled Cheese

INGREDIENTS (for one sandwich)

2 slices artisan bread (try rosemary, tomato-basil or carrot-onion)
2-4 ounces mild cheese, sliced or shredded, as desired (try cheddar, brick or fresh mozzarella)
1-2 Tablespoons fresh herbs, whole or chopped, as desired (try thyme, basil, dill or a mix)
1-2 Tablespoons unsalted soft butter or **Herb Butter**

DIRECTIONS

Preheat griddle or heavy skillet over medium heat.

Assemble sandwich with herbs layered between cheese slices. Butter the outside.

Cook slowly until browned and crispy with melted cheese.

Serve immediately.

Tricks and Tips

I had this soup on-board Uniworld's River Ambassador and Chef Milas was more than willing to share his recipe. I made two changes, one for flavor and one for convenience.

The flavor change was to add dried thyme to the sautéing veggies to create a deeper, layered herb flavor.

For convenience, I chose not to peel the tomatoes before cooking. Since the soup has to be sieved to remove the seeds, peeling seemed an unnecessary step.

Herb Butter

1 stick softened unsalted butter
3 Tablespoons fresh herbs, minced
1/2 teaspoon finely ground sea salt

Thoroughly mix together ingredients. Cover and refrigerate 24 hours. Bring to room temperature before serving.



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About the Recipe

Beth originally got this recipe from a neighbor in Connecticut. Since Beth cooks (in her own words) "like an engineer" she didn't change a thing. I used the thick cut oats I had on hand, and twice the amount of chocolate, in small chunks instead of chips.

Be sure to follow the recipe's method though, since adding the oil alternately with the wet and dry ingredients lightens the dough and makes the finished cookie both tender and crispy!

Beth's Spring Fling Cookies

INGREDIENTS

3 1/2 cups flour

3 teaspoons baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup unsalted butter, softened (2 sticks)

1 cup granulated sugar

1 cup brown sugar, packed

1 Tablespoon milk

2 teaspoons vanilla

1 egg

1 cup vegetable oil

1 1/2 cups each rolled oats (regular or thick cut) and popped rice cereal (Rice Krispies)

12 ounces chocolate chunks (original recipe used 6 ounces of chocolate chips)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line cookie sheets with parchment paper.

Sift together dry ingredients—flour, baking soda and salt. Set aside. Beat together wet ingredients—butter, sugars, milk, vanilla and egg.

Mix wet and dry ingredients alternately with oil. Stir in oats, cereal and chocolate.

Place small spoonfuls on cookie sheet and bake 8-10 minutes, until edges are brown.

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