

Hogtown HomeGrown™

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Fiddlehead ferns and blueberry slump

It started last May with a chance to search New England for local specialties like johnny-cakes, clam cakes, clear chowder and my unexpected find, fig squares. This year, with Jeff as my companion, our taste buds toured New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Massachusetts to find more clear chowder and fig squares, plus new local food and recipes.

A couple of delightful foodie firsts came our way during lunch at Matunuck Oyster Bar in Rhode Island. The first, fiddleheads ferns, garnished a salad of fresh picked spring greens, tiny peas, delicate haricot vert and pistachios tossed in a green goddess dressing. With a texture like raw asparagus and flavor like nutty avocado, we found the ferns a tasty novelty and would like to try them again.

We felt the same way about our other appetizer, yet another new experience, uni or sea urchin, which was served with a soy reduction (think thick, lightly sweetened teriyaki) over a bed of very fresh chopped seaweed. Uni's texture is much like ripe avocado, so it was sprinkled with a few black and white sesame seeds for a little crunch. The taste started like seawater and finished sweet. The sea urchin we ate was harvested in Maine, since apparently they taste sweeter when they live in colder waters.

Our main-course lobster rolls were beautiful and delicious. Each crunchy toasted split-top bun was filled with huge pieces of tender claw meat and just a hint of mayo. Perfect French fries went almost untouched, but Jeff did manage to finish his pint of local lager!

Once Jeff was safely on a plane for home, I headed to my spring fling in Cape Cod where the lobster fest continued over three nights—lobster grilled cheese with Havarti on grilled sourdough, a lobster reuben on marble rye and finally, a whole lobster with all the fixings—corn, sweet potato and melted butter.

And of course, while we were eating, the other attendees and I were talking about food. A dessert menu revealed something called Grapenut Pudding, also known as Grapenut Custard. After we all tasted it, one of my dining companions remarked that her mother's was better, so of course I asked for the recipe and the story behind it, which I have shared on Page 4. Valerie not only shared that New England specialty, but when the conversation turned to blueberries, her daughter told me about her recipe for blueberry slump.

What's a slump? While there are varying definitions, a slump is a pot of hot fruit cooked on the stove which is topped with drop dumpling dough and covered with a lid so the dough is cooked by the heat and steam in the pot. It is a New England or East Coast specialty and resembles it's oven-baked cousin, the cobbler. Valerie's version, made easier with frozen berries and biscuit mix, is served with a lemon sauce, but most recipes recommend vanilla ice cream. I didn't realize it at the time, but I've made slumps from berries or peaches when I didn't want to heat up the house by turning on the oven.

All too soon everyone but me left for home and our hostess suggested lunch at her favorite place, The Boat House in North Tiverton, Rhode Island. It was finally my chance to order the very local Pt. Judith Calamari served with fried cherry peppers. I highly recommend it, along with the Bay Scallop Roll and grilled corn with lobster mayonnaise and roe.

So with a full tummy, it was time to head home to Hogtown. Once again, I managed to fulfill the Eat Local Challenge on vacation—I ate something local every meal, every day.

What's Fresh Right Now?

Bananas

Beans—green, purple, yellow

Beets—red, golden

Blueberries

Bok Choy—tot soi, mei choi

Cabbage—green, cone, napa

Carrots—orange, yellow

Celery

Corn

Cucumbers—slices, kirby

Eggplant—fairytale, graffiti, purple italian

Fennel

Garlic—chives

Ginger

Greens—arugula, collards, lacinto/curly kale

Herbs—parsley, dill, cilantro, curry leaf, italian/thai basil, mint, thyme

Honey—orange blossom, gallberry, wildflower, tupelo

Kohlrabi

Leeks

Lettuce—salad mix

Moringa

Mushrooms—shiitake, white/blue/yellow oyster, lion's mane, trumpet, dried shiitake

Okra

Onions—green, red

Papaya—green, ripe

Peas—field

Peppers—green bell, shishito, jalapeno, cherry bomb, serrano, poblano, anaheim, roasted pepper mixes

Potatoes—red/white, sweet

Radicchio—purple, treviso

Radishes—globe

Rutabaga

Shoots and Sprouts

Squash—round/long/italian zucchini, yellow, white/yellow pattypan, kobacha, acorn, hubbard, spaghetti, butternut

Strawberries

Tomatoes—cluster, heirloom, grape

Turmeric

Watermelon—red flesh, gold on gold

Local and Fresh— Blueberries

Harvested from February to June, blueberries from North Central Florida are the first in markets around the country every year. The perennial plants are related to cranberries and boast several varieties suited to our climate.

Look for firm dry berries. Store covered in the refrigerator and wait to wash until ready to eat or use. Check berries for stems before using.

Freeze washed and air-dried berries in zip-top freezer bags. Squeeze out as much air as possible before sealing each bag. Frozen blueberries may be used in place of fresh in most recipes. Do not thaw before using.

Blueberry Slump

INGREDIENTS

4 cups fresh or frozen blueberries or peaches

1/2 cup sugar or more to taste

Zest and juice of a lemon

Nutmeg, cinnamon or ginger to taste

Pinch of salt

1 cup flour

1/3 cup sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 Tablespoons melted butter

3/4 cup whole milk

Nutmeg, cinnamon or ginger if desired

DIRECTIONS

In a large pot cook berries with sugar, lemon zest and juice, salt and desired spice for 15-30 minutes until bubbly and very juicy. Add up to 1/2 cup water if necessary to create a juicy sauce.

In a separate bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Stir in butter and milk until a loose dough forms.

Divide dough into 6-8 dumplings and gently drop into bubbling berries. Top each with a dusting of spice if desired and tightly cover pot.

Cook 20-30 minutes until dough is cooked through. Serve hot or warm.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Blueberry Pecan Pancakes

INGREDIENTS

2 cups whole wheat flour or a combination of all purpose and whole wheat
1/4 cup cornmeal
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoons melted butter
1-2 Tablespoons maple syrup, honey or cane syrup
2 eggs
2 cups buttermilk
1 cup fresh blueberries
1/2 cup chopped or whole pecans

DIRECTIONS

Stir together dry ingredients until well-combined.

In a large bowl, beat together melted butter and sweetener. Add eggs and beat until completely combined. Stir in buttermilk.

Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients and stir until no lumps remain. Let batter sit at room temperature for 15-30 minutes.

Heat griddle or cast iron pan over medium heat until water drops dance on the surface. Stir batter again and use 1/4 or 1/3 cup measuring cup to scoop out enough for each pancake. Pour onto heated griddle and top with a few blueberries and pecans.

Flip each pancake when dry bubbles appear around the edges. Cook until center is firm.

Keep warm in a 250 degree oven under foil or in a covered casserole.

Serve hot with warm maple syrup or Blueberry Topping.

Blueberry Topping

INGREDIENTS

2 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
1/4 cup sugar (or more to taste)
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

In a deep saucepan, over medium heat, combine blueberries and sugar. Mash lightly with a potato masher to release juices. Let berries simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add lemon juice, return to a simmer and taste. Adjust sweetness as desired. Simmer an additional 15 minutes to thicken.

Remove from heat. Stir again and serve warm.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Cooled topping may be frozen for extended storage.

Blueberry Chutney

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup red onion, chopped
1 Tablespoon each fresh ginger and garlic, finely chopped
1 teaspoon each lemon zest, cardamom, sumac and coriander
2 cups blueberries
2 Tablespoons each fresh lemon juice and cane syrup
1/2 cup each golden raisins and toasted pecan pieces
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 Tablespoon sherry or cider vinegar

DIRECTIONS

In a saucepan, combine onion, garlic, ginger, lemon zest, spices, blueberries, lemon juice and cane syrup. Mash berries, bring to a simmer and stir in remaining ingredients. Simmer 15 minutes and remove from heat. Serve warm



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A Few Words
from Valerie to her
daughter Laura
about the recipe

"Grapenut Pudding is
easy. Through the
years, dear, it was trial
and error. I guess you
could say it was "to
taste" - daddy's taste -
how he liked it best.

Then when he said
"Not bad!" I just kept
doing that recipe."

Miss Valerie is a long-
time resident of Massa-
chusetts. The recipe
was shared with the
help of her daughter
Laura, who also enjoys
this old-timey New
England dessert. Laura
likes her Grapenut
Pudding served warm,
with lots of real
whipped cream.

Valerie's Grapenut Pudding

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup Grapenuts
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 gallon (64 ounces) half and half
- 6 large eggs, beaten
- 3 teaspoons real vanilla extract
- Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 300 degrees.
- Grease a large, deep Pyrex dish.
- Combine all ingredients.
- Pour into prepared Pyrex dish.
- Bake until a knife blade inserted into the middle comes out clean.
- Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

SERVING SUGGESTION

- Serve warm with real whipped cream.

Whipped Cream

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup organic whipping cream

DIRECTIONS

- Place 1-2 quart metal bowl and whisk or beaters in freezer for at least an hour.
- Pour cream into cold bowl and beat with whisk or electric mixer until firm peaks form. Cover and refrigerate or serve immediately.