

From Dr. Preston Maring's Farmers' Market Update & Recipe of the Week Newsletters Volume 5

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6/30/05

West L.A. Kaiser Permanente joins Baldwin Park, Fontana and Harbor City in establishing a farmers' market. Dr. Howard Fullman is the Area Medical Director at the medical center and reports the market "has been a huge success in improving ambience, morale and promoting our brand image."

This week's recipe makes an easy picnic lunch. Make the sandwich thicker than you think you might be able to bite because you squish the vegetables together when you wrap it. The first of the season's tomatoes have arrived at the market. These and some of the other ingredients are available fresh and locally grown.

Pan Bagna

All amounts are per sandwich

For the tapenade

- 15 pitted Kalamata olives (at 0.5 gm of fat per olive = 7.5 gm good fat)
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/2 Tbsp olive oil

For the sandwich

- 1 6"-long piece of ciabatta bread, halved lengthwise
- 1/4 cup thinly sliced red onion
- 3 small tomatoes, thinly sliced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 roasted red or yellow pepper (from the jar makes it easier)
- About 1/2 cup arugula leaves
- 1 small bunch fresh basil
- 1-1/2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- A little olive oil to drizzle

Blend the pitted olives, garlic and 1/2 Tbsp olive oil in a food processor leaving small chunks of olive.

To make room for vegetables, hollow out a little of the inside of the cut bread and eat it. Spread the tapenade on the bottom layer of bread. Layer the red onion, tomatoes, salt and pepper to taste, red or yellow pepper, arugula and basil. Sprinkle with balsamic vinegar. Drizzle the top piece of bread with a little olive oil. Wrap the sandwich tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate one hour to overnight.

Take a hike to get part of your 10,000 steps per day and reward yourself with this wonderful and nutritious sandwich.

7/8/05

There are times of the year that feel like rebirth: the Winter Solstice when the days begin to lengthen again, the arrival of baby asparagus when the ground temperature reaches 65° in Fresno, and now, with the blessing of the first cherry tomatoes. This week's recipe is easy and delicious. Go to Epicurious.com and search for cherry tomatoes. You will find this recipe and hundreds of others.

Blue cheese has about 8 gm of fat per ounce, 5 gm of which is saturated fat. Using 4 oz of blue cheese in the recipe may sound unwise, but the salad serves six with normal portion size. Saturated fat per serving for six people amounts to a little over 3 gm. A low fat diet may have 8 to 10% of daily caloric intake as saturated fat. Two hundred calories worth of saturated fats out of a 2,000 calorie daily diet means you can eat 22 gm of saturated fats per day. You have can your blue cheese and eat it too. This also holds true for the gorgonzola that accompanies caramelized onions on a pizza you will hear about in the near future.

Corn, Cherry Tomato, Arugula & Blue Cheese Salad

Serves 6

- 6 ears fresh corn, kernels cut off
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 4 celery stalks, diced
- 1/2 red onion, diced
- 2 large handfuls arugula leaves, coarsely chopped
- 2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 4 oz blue cheese, crumbled to make about 1 cup

Combine the first five ingredients in a large salad bowl. In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil into the balsamic vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Add 3/4 cup of blue cheese. Pour dressing over the salad and toss. Garnish with the remaining blue cheese. Cover and chill up to four hours before serving. This is one of those dishes that causes people to exclaim how good it is while their mouths are still full.

7/17/05

The variety of tomatoes available at local farmers' markets has grown exponentially as the number of sunny days accumulates. Because of the rainy spring, some tomatoes have been renamed "Not So Early Girls." Pick up a mixture of red "Sweet 100" and golden "Sungold" cherry tomatoes for this week's featured recipe, a wonderful, simple pasta recipe.

Dr. Greg Rumore, one of our expert pathologists, wondered if I had forgotten to publish the method of cooking the corn for last week's corn, tomato, arugula and blue cheese salad. The young and tender sweet corn doesn't need to be cooked, just cut from the cob. He served it uncooked with a pan-roasted pork tenderloin to his family's rave reviews.

While I often cook new dishes to find recipes to share, I return to old favorites. If you haven't tried Marinated Salmon with Watermelon - Sesame Salsa, it's incredibly good and can be found in Volume 1 of the recipes.

Pasta with Red & Gold Cherry Tomatoes

Serves 4 to 6

1-1/2 pounds mixed cherry tomatoes, halved
3 large shallots, minced
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
Scant 1/4 tsp hot red pepper flakes
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1/2 cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves
1 lb dried pasta (pick a shape with concavities
to hold the sauce better - for more pasta shapes,
see <http://www.foodsubs.com/PastaShapes.html>)

In a large sauté pan, combine tomatoes, shallots, olive oil, red pepper flakes, salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a simmer and cook until the tomatoes release some of their juices, but haven't yet totally collapsed. This will take only about 5 minutes. Cut the basil leaves into thin ribbons and mix into the sauce.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the pasta until al dente. Drain and return it to the pot. Mix in the sauce. Adjust seasonings and serve in warm bowls. I love the simplicity and rich taste of this dish and hope you do too.

7/22/05

If you are only going to eat chocolate occasionally, eat the very best quality chocolate you can find. The same holds true for gazpacho. The quality and flavor of heirloom tomatoes is critical for this week's recipe. They come in many colors, from deep purple to bright yellow. Taste test them at your market. Visualize a chilled, spicy and chunky gazpacho that almost makes a meal in a bowl. Most recipes use tomato juice. This recipe, modified from Epicurious.com, recommends squishing the vegetables with your fingers. While it was kind of fun for a while, a food processor did a better job than my fingers on the firmer chunks. The original recipe calls for a red and yellow bell pepper. They aren't yet in season at our market so I used bottled roasted red peppers. The "heat" can be varied to taste. I might use jalapeño Tabasco next time. The flavors and texture make this a wonderfully complex and tasty offering.

Heirloom Tomato Gazpacho

Makes 8 servings

- 6 large heirloom tomatoes of all colors, seeded and diced into 1/4" pieces
(reserve the seeds and liquid)
- 1 red onion, diced 1/4"
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded, and diced 1/4"
- 2 roasted red peppers, diced 1/4"
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro, coarsely chopped
- 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1/2 Tbsp Tabasco®
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 8 Tbsp balsamic vinegar

In a bowl, combine the tomatoes, seeds, liquid, onion, cucumber and peppers. Add cilantro, red wine vinegar, lemon juice, and Tabasco®. Season with salt and pepper. Here's where I tried squishing the ingredients, bailed out, and used the food processor to blend about 2/3 of the vegetables in batches. It still made a very chunky soup. Stir in the oil a little at a time, tasting as you go. Chill for at least an hour. Drizzle about 1 Tbsp of balsamic vinegar per serving and stir in.

Dr. Desiree Backman is the Director of California's "5 A Day" (servings of fruits and vegetables) Campaign for the California Department of Health Services in Sacramento. She learned about Kaiser Permanente's farmers' markets at a conference about the Central Valley's communities, agriculture and economy in May. Last week I learned that she had organized a farmers' market for the state employees and surrounding community. It opened two weeks ago with about 30 vendors and many happy shoppers. Perseverance was needed. The CHP controlled the property in front of her building. Zoning only allowed the sale of food during parades in the back of her building. The market ended up in a local community park with easy access for many. Bringing produce to the people works outside of healthcare facilities too.

You can find most of the ingredients you need for this week's recipe at the Happy Boys Farm stand at the Oakland Medical Center or at your local farmers' market. This is a wonderfully tasty and simple dinner salad that is perfect for a hot night or a cold night.

Chicken and Spinach Salad

- 1 lb boned and skinned chicken breasts, about 4 small halves
- 3/4 lb baby spinach leaves, rinsed and chilled
- 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 Tbsp capers, rinsed and drained
- 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 medium red onion, minced (works well with yellow onion too)
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced (if you cut off the hard stem end before smashing them, the peel almost jumps off the clove)
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- Salt and pepper

Rinse the chicken and cut into 1/4" wide strips. Whisk together the vinegar, 3 Tbsp of the olive oil, capers and mustard in a small bowl. Put the spinach in a large salad bowl. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the remaining olive oil and chicken. The chicken needs to cook about four minutes, but you can't start to stir it right away or it will stick. Add the onion and garlic. Stir for about one minute. Add the vinaigrette and stir until it's hot. Pour it all over the spinach. The leaves will wilt somewhat but still be recognizable. Top with cherry tomatoes and mix. Season with salt and pepper.

Per serving: 315 calories, 29 gm protein, 15 gm of fat (only 2.2 gm sat), 16 gm carbohydrate (6 gm fiber), 426 mg sodium, 66 mg cholesterol.

8/5/05

The red, orange, yellow and deep purple colors of heirloom and cherry tomatoes get much of the attention at the summer markets. Basil is often in a supporting role. This week, pick a large bunch of the deep green and fragrant basil from Happy Boys Farm. It stars in this most simple of pasta dishes.

Those paying close attention to what they eat may eschew traditional pesto with pasta recipes because of the amounts of fat and carbs. Evidence-based eating may allow you to have this tasty dish after all. Occasionally I get requests for detailed nutritional information on the weekly recipes. Extensive nutritional information for each ingredient can be found by googling "USDA Nutritional Database". The fat content in the cheese, olive oil and pine nuts adds up to about 16 gm per serving with only 3 gm of saturated fat. A 2,000-calorie per day diet can have up to 600 calories from fat with 200 calories as saturated fat. At 16 gm (144 calories) of fat per serving, this part of your dinner will only comprise one quarter of your daily recommended fat intake and 1/7 of the saturated fat allowance. There are about 50 gm of carbohydrates per serving with 60 mg of calcium from cheese and another 20 mg from basil. This source of 80 mg adds a little to the recommended greater than 1,000 mg calcium day (1,200 to 1,500 mg for women).

You can make this week's recipe using a mortar and pestle. I opted for a food processor as it was already late in the evening.

Pasta with Pesto

Serves 6

2 cups fresh basil leaves, packed
4 cloves garlic, peeled
1/2 tsp salt
Freshly ground pepper
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/4 cup pine nuts, lightly toasted in a small skillet
1/3 cup mixed grated parmesan and pecorino romano cheese
1 lb dried linguine

Bring a pasta pot full of salted water to a boil. Meanwhile, pulse the garlic and salt a few times in the food processor. Add the basil leaves and pulse until chopped. Add the pine nuts and cheese. With the food processor running, drizzle in the olive oil. Add pepper and more salt if needed.

Cook the pasta. Put the pesto in a large skillet with about 1/3 cup of the pasta water. The risk here is draining the pasta and watching the 1/3 cup you need go down the drain. Add the hot pasta to the pesto and water. Mix thoroughly and enjoy. Add more salt and pepper as needed.

8/12/05

One week without using tomatoes in a recipe of the week was enough. It's best to eat them now when they are in peak season. This week's recipe will free you from the tyranny of balsamic vinegar. Other vinegars can compliment tomatoes as well.

Summer Tomatoes

2 lb any tomatoes, except sauce tomatoes

(Happy Boys Farm has cherry tomatoes and heirlooms of all colors.)

3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

2 Tbsp malt vinegar

(It doesn't necessarily have to be aged for 10 years to be good.)

3/4 tsp brown sugar

1/2 tsp salt

1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper

Sliced green onion for garnish

Slice the tomatoes into thick slices and arrange on a serving plate. Whisk the other ingredients in a bowl and then dress the tomatoes. Garnish with the green onion. This went well with toasted spaghetti and clam sauce. Stay tuned.

8/19/05

During day two in the life of a loaf of bread, there is still hope of using it as your dinner bread if you moisten it and heat it at 350° for a few minutes. By day three, it is inevitably tough and chewy with a different destiny. It is now perfect for panzanella, the classic Tuscan bread and tomato salad. The aging bread soaks up the tomato juices. But you don't have to wait three days to have a simple and delicious version of this dish. Broken toasted pita pieces can be made any time. The fresh mint and lemon vinaigrette brighten the flavors. As always, use the ripest locally grown tomatoes you can find at your farmers' market.

Toasted Pita & Tomato Salad

Serves 2

- 2 big heirloom tomatoes
or the equivalent Early Girls or cherry tomatoes
- 6 large mint leaves, coarsely chopped
- 4 scallions (white and some of the light green part), thinly sliced
- 2 oz Greek or Bulgarian feta cheese, crumbled
- Arugula or baby romaine lettuce pieces, enough for two
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 large or 2 small pita breads

Preheat the oven to 350°. Open the pita. Separate the halves. Toast them on a baking sheet for about 10 minutes until crispy. Break them into aesthetically pleasing pieces. Chop the tomatoes into bite size pieces and put into a bowl along with the juices. Mix in the chopped mint, scallions, feta and pita pieces gently. Whisk the olive oil into the lemon juice in a small bowl. Salt and pepper the vinaigrette to taste. Dress the tomato mixture and toss gently. Mound the tomato mixture on a bed of greens and serve. The crispy pita pieces may get sampled by family or friends before the salad gets to the table.

Since the farmers' market came to our workplace over two years ago, it's been easy to get ideas for new dishes to cook. Often you can just pick up what's fresh and beautiful and the recipe comes to you from cookbooks, the internet, magazines, newspapers or from friends who also like to cook.

A friend gave me a bag of farro along with a recipe for *Farro Con Calamaretti, Rucola e Pomodori Ciliegolini*. Though not bilingual in Italian, I figured the recipe called for the arugula and cherry tomatoes I had brought home from Happy Boys Farm. While I like squid, I opted for fresh tuna this time. This is definitely a "will make it again" dish.

Although I had never cooked with it, farro is a wholesome and nutritious grain that has been used for thousands of years. Information on the net is confusing as some say you have to soak it overnight and cook it two hours. "Pearled" farro has had the outer hulls removed and cooks faster. One pragmatic cook simply advised following the cooking instructions on the bag. You may have to find this grain at an Italian deli. The search is absolutely worth it as it makes a spectacular, tasty, light yet slightly chewy grain salad.

Farro with Tuna, Arugula & Cherry Tomatoes

1 cup farro
 3 cups water
 3 handfuls baby arugula leaves
 1/2 pint cherry tomatoes, quartered
 1/2 lb to 1 lb fresh tuna, sliced into 1/4" strips
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1 shallot, diced
 6 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
 Juice of one lemon
 Salt and freshly ground pepper

Bring the water to a boil in a saucepan. Add the farro, reduce the heat and simmer, partially covered, for 20 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Combine the farro, arugula and tomatoes in a large salad bowl. In a small bowl, whisk 5 Tbsp olive oil into the lemon juice. Season the dressing with salt and pepper.

Heat 1 Tbsp olive oil in a skillet over medium high heat until it shimmers. Add the garlic and shallots. Stir a few times then sauté the tuna until just done.

Add the tuna to the salad and toss with the dressing. Adjust the seasonings and serve. Feel good about complex carbohydrates.

Kaiser Permanente people, in partnership with the Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association, keep expanding the reach of our farmers' markets. Market leaders in our Santa Teresa facility created a "Cookin' The Market" program that takes fresh farmers' market foods out to community groups and schools for cooking demonstrations. They received a commendation from the City of San Jose at the City Council meeting of August 30th for their role in teaching the public about better nutrition.

Evidently, per capita intake of tomatoes is 17 lb per year in the United States. There's definitely enough time left in the tomato season to take a break for at least one recipe of the week. Use some of your 10,000 steps per day to go to a farmers' market and pick up fresh, local ingredients for this week's nonfat offering. This tomato-free version of gazpacho could be part of a great Labor Day picnic.

Watermelon and Cucumber Gazpacho

Serves 4 to 6

- 1 seedless watermelon (about 3 lb), diced
(you need only about 5 cups, which leaves extras for snacking)
- 1 cucumber, diced (Armenian cucumbers don't need to be peeled)
- 1 large yellow or red bell pepper
- 1 small jalapeño, seeded and minced (even one small one makes the gazpacho quite spicy — you will need to experiment with this depending on the household tastes)
- 1/2 small red onion, diced
- 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh mint (takes a handful of leaves)
- 3 Tbsp fresh lime juice (one large lime or 1- 1/2 small ones)
- 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1/4 tsp salt

Purée 4 cups of the watermelon. In a large bowl, mix in the remaining watermelon and everything else. Taste for "heat." Add more jalapeño if you wish. Chill for at least an hour. This is a great appetizer that's sweet with heat.

More markets are on the way. South San Francisco and Fresno Kaiser Permanente have obtained their permits. Evidently, three more facilities in L.A. have received permits also. The directors of the Southland Farmers' Market Association will be working with us to expand the reach of markets in our Southern California Region as our markets continue to grow in the North.

To accompany a big salad from your local farmers' market, try this basic fish stew. (It isn't one of the usual stews that uses seafood of all shapes, sizes and color of shells.) Squid and fresh white-fleshed fish go well together to make a good protein source and tasty dinner. This may look complicated to make but it really isn't and is well worth the time it takes.

Seafood Stew

- 8 cups fish stock
(you can usually buy it frozen at a supermarket or fish market)
- 2 carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 celery rib, thinly sliced
- 2 yellow onions, one sliced and one diced
- 1/4 tsp black peppercorns
- 2 lb baby squid, cleaned
(If you buy them allegedly "cleaned," be sure to check for leftover beaks at the fat end of the tentacles and wings still attached to the bodies.)
- 2 lb fresh white-fleshed fish (e.g. cod or halibut cut into 1" chunks)
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 anchovy fillets, minced (I prefer to use anchovy paste which is a combination of anchovies and a little olive oil and comes in a tube. Opening a fresh can of anchovies is difficult and seems to splatter as you pull hard to get the metal lid off.)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- 1/2 tsp crushed red chili flakes
- 1/2 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley plus more for garnish
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 baguette cut diagonally in 1/2" slices

Preheat your oven to 325°. Arrange the baguette slices on a cookie sheet and bake until they are crisp, 15 to 20 minutes.

In a large saucepan, add the carrots, celery, black peppercorns and sliced onion to the fish stock. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 30 minutes. Strain into another pan discarding the solids. Don't do what I did once with turkey stock and dump it through the strainer down the drain.

Chop enough of the tentacles to measure about 1/2 cup. Cook the diced onion in 1 Tbsp olive oil with 1/2 tsp salt in a large soup pot until soft. Add the anchovies or anchovy paste, garlic, chilis and tomato, cooking until some of the liquid has evaporated. Add the chopped squid and 1/2 cup parsley and cook a few minutes. Add the wine and boil until reduced by half.

Meanwhile, toss the squid rings with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Brown them briefly in a hot skillet or grill pan to add a little color to the stew.

Add the squid rings, chunks of fish and flavored fish stock to the pot. Bring to a simmer and cook, partially covered for about 5 minutes or until the fish is flaky. Adjust the seasoning. Put a slice or two of the toasted baguette into a soup bowl. Ladle in the stew. Garnish with more parsley. I think you will like this.

KP's Quality and Operations Support department provides superb data, analysis and consultative services to all the KP facilities in Northern California. They also have a lot of fun at work as a group. Sue Flautt from QOS, PJ Ballard from Media Relations and I were invited to judge their first Thrive cooking contest last week, which featured food from around the world. Never before had I tasted a Green Mung Bean and Pearl Tapioca Soup; it was excellent. The department created a colorful cookbook. Some of the recipes take advantage of the fruits and vegetables available at our farmers' market.

I have always felt like a profligate cook when using scallions. Most recipes tell you to thinly slice the white part, a little of the light green part and discard the rest. This week's recipe uses the whole bunch. VB Farms in Watsonville grows the luscious organic strawberries sold at our market. Lately they have also been offering bunches of scallions, the root ends of which are a rich purple color. A few bunches of these and the usual white scallions make for a good sauce for pasta. Spaghetti with Scallion Sauce is an easy and economical main course.

Spaghetti with Scallion Sauce

Serves 4

- 4 bunches scallions, about 4 cups, sliced (The bunches at our market are about twice as big as the bunches at the grocery stores.)
- 3 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp freshly grated lemon zest
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 3/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground pepper
- 1 oz parmigiano-reggiano grated, about 1/2 cup
- 1 lb of spaghetti

Bring water to a boil in a large pasta pot. Sauté the scallions and garlic in 3 Tbsp olive oil in a skillet for about 5 minutes or until soft. In a food processor or blender, purée them. Add the remaining olive oil, lemon zest, salt and pepper. Purée some more. Cook the spaghetti. BEFORE dumping out the pasta water, mix 1/2 cup of it into the scallion mixture and purée to thin the sauce a little. Drain the pasta. Toss the pasta, sauce and parmesan cheese in the skillet over medium heat until coated. Adjust seasonings and serve. The taste is fresh and light with just a touch of lemon.

Lucilla Santos is the Food Service Director at the L.A. South Bay Kaiser Permanente facility. Not to be hindered by the lengthy process required to obtain a permit to start their farmers' market, she and her colleagues are taking the focus on good food to the community. The Kaiser Permanente nutritionists and dieticians are teaching cooking classes at the YMCA. They had 52 people including kids ages 5 to 12 and parents for a recent class in a six-week series. Next is a class for teenagers without the parents. In addition, they are working with a local school to create an urban garden. There may be no better way to tackle the obesity epidemic in children than to teach them to cook food they have grown themselves.

This week's recipe for Caesar Salad should definitely replace the earlier version I shared in the past. It has become a family favorite and a great way to use "Romaines of the Day" from Happy Boys Farm. Because it doesn't use raw eggs, no-one has to be concerned about salmonella or the extra cholesterol. To make this a complete dinner salad, consider adding boneless skinless chicken breast (grilled or pan-sautéed and sliced.)

Caesar Salad

Bag of hearts of romaine lettuce

Dressing

- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 Tbsp sherry vinegar
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1/2 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 3" long squiggle of anchovy paste
- 1 Tbsp capers, rinsed and dried
- 4 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 oz parmegiano-reggiano cheese, shaved

Croutons

- 3 cups French bread cubes, crouton-sized
- 4 Tbsp olive oil
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed
- 1 Tbsp paprika
- 1 oz parmegiano-reggiano, grated

Wash and thoroughly dry the romaine. Chill.

Preheat oven to 350°. Add 6 smashed garlic cloves to 4 tbsp olive oil in a small saucepan. Heat oil until very hot and turn off immediately. Let it sit for about 15 minutes. Discard the garlic. Toss the bread cubes with the garlic-flavored olive oil and paprika in a medium mixing bowl. Bake the croutons on a baking sheet for 15 minutes or until crispy and well-browned. Grate 1 oz parmesan. Toss the hot croutons with the parmesan in the mixing bowl.

In a food processor, blender or mini-processor, combine 1/2 of the lemon juice, sherry vinegar, 3 smashed cloves of garlic, Dijon mustard and a good pinch of salt and pepper. Let sit five minutes so the salt dissolves. Add the Worcestershire, anchovy paste, and capers. Process until smooth. Drizzle in the olive oil while the processor is running to emulsify the dressing. Add more of the lemon juice to taste.

Use just enough of the dressing to moisten the romaine. Shave 1 oz parmesan on top of the salad and toss all with the croutons.

Dale Simmons is a fourth generation farmer and is the first generation organic farmer in his family. Fruits and vegetables from his Lone Oak Ranch in Reedley, CA near Fresno have been featured at Oakland's Friday Fresh Farmers' Market every week since it opened in May, 2003. He recently formed a Fresno Farmers' Market Association to support farmers' markets in the Central Valley. Last Wednesday, thanks to Mr. Simmons and the leadership at Fresno Kaiser Permanente, they opened a farmers' market at the facility and had a very successful opening day. Markets may move north to Sacramento Kaiser Permanente by spring.

The annual Physician Health Fair at the Oakland Medical Center will take place on Friday September 30th. There will be several stations to learn cool garlic mincing and onion dicing techniques. Participating doctors will earn a zucchini sauté kit complete with the chopped garlic, onion and fresh herbs. To celebrate zucchini season, this week's recipe gives the very simple guidelines for preparing this tasty vegetable.

Summer Squash Sauté

- 1 lb zucchini or patty pan squash sliced 1/8" thick (the UFO-shaped squash with the scalloped edges)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 yellow onion, diced or 1 large shallot, diced
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- Handful of chopped fresh herbs (I used parsley, basil and mint)

In a skillet with a cover, heat the olive oil and sauté the garlic and onion until just soft. Toss the squash in the skillet to coat with the olive oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover and cook over medium-low heat for about 5 minutes stirring a couple of times. Sweep in the fresh herbs, adjust seasoning and serve. Garnish the edge of the plate with little green herb specks so it looks like you're eating at a restaurant.

Save Thursday November 17th, if you can, to attend Food Med: The First Conference on Healthy Food in Healthcare sponsored jointly by Kaiser Permanente, Catholic Healthcare West and Health Care Without Harm. You can register at www.foodmed.org.

From the registration site:



When: November 17, 2005

Where: Oakland, California USA

As places of healing, hospitals have a natural incentive to provide food that is healthy for people and the environment in which we live. By understanding the link between food production and food related disease, health care practitioners can begin to educate their patients, model appropriate food purchasing and help transition the way our food production and distribution system to one that is protective of human health.

This week's recipe can be part of a healthy diet. Just one tablespoon of this salsa can add intense flavor to a pan-roasted boneless, skinless chicken breast or a fish fillet. Salsa Verde will be a little different every time you make it depending on the availability of fresh herbs.

Salsa Verde

- 1/2 cup tightly packed, chopped flat-leafed parsley
(takes about 1 cup loosely packed parsley)
- 3 Tbsp tightly packed, chopped fresh herbs — any combination of tarragon, chervil, chives, mint, cilantro and basil
- 1 Tbsp capers, rinsed, drained, dried and coarsely chopped
- 2 tsp lemon zest (I invested in an inexpensive zester/grater which works well for this and parmesan cheese. It changed my life.)
- 1 Tbsp finely diced shallot or red onion
- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste — it takes a little while for salt to dissolve in olive oil, so don't add too much too fast

Mix everything together. A little goes a long way.

Despite our farmers' market losing 25% of its space during this phase of constructing our much needed new Emergency Department, patrons of our market still enjoyed the sunshine, fruits and vegetables offered last week. I found some beautiful, purple eggplants and tried a very cool way of roasting them with garlic, which involves making a slit with a paring knife then sliding a slice of garlic along the blade into the eggplant. After all that, I didn't really like my seasonings in the finished product.

In my email, like magic, came another recipe from a trusted source that absolutely makes the cut for a recipe of the week. It goes really well over pan-roasted chicken or fish, just like last week's Salsa Verde. When you buy ingredients from the market or the Food Mill, be sure to enter the Healthy Eating Raffle that can win you gift certificates for good food.

Starting with the recipe of the week next week, there will be a new look to this newsletter. It will look more like other mainstream Kaiser Permanente online publications. Soon there will also be a link to allow you to forward the newsletter to a friend (or someone you don't like) and additional useful links.

An occasional feature in this column will compare and contrast the costs of buying prepared foods vs. cooking from scratch. Eating out would, of course, be even more expensive. As an example, here are the costs for a commonly purchased, pre-packaged meal.

- Pre-made Vegetable Lasagna for two: \$7.98
- Vegetable Lasagna made at home from conventionally farmed ingredients for two: \$3.20
- Vegetable Lasagna made at home from organic ingredients for two: \$3.66

I haven't figured out exactly what this week's recipe costs, but I'm sure it's cheaper than eating out or take-out.

Tasty Tomato Mushroom Ragout

Serves 4

3 bunches small leeks, white and light green portions thinly sliced
1 small onion, thinly sliced

About 1 dozen cremini mushrooms, cut into chunks (These are the commonplace mushrooms I first associate with the word "mushroom.")
4 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
1/4 cup dry white or red wine
1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
1/4 cup Dijon mustard
1/4 cup chopped parsley
Salt and pepper
2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

In a large sauté pan, slowly brown the leeks and onions in the olive oil. Add the mushroom chunks, some salt and pepper, and brown the mushrooms for about 5 minutes. Add the garlic slices and sauté until aromatic. *Deglaze the pan with the white or red wine, cook down a little, and then add the cherry tomatoes. They will release a little juice. Stir in the Dijon and simmer to let some of the liquid cook down. Mix in the chopped parsley, adjust the seasoning and serve over a lean source of protein. This is incredibly tasty and healthy.

(*Deglaze: dissolve the remaining bits of sautéed food in the pan by adding a liquid and heating)

10/14/05

Long-time recipients of my newsletter will notice the new look of this week's email. New links below will allow you to forward this newsletter to friends and to subscribe to the weekly Farmers' Market Update and Recipe of the Week. I want to assure you that each recipe will still have been pre-tested in my kitchen.

The best way to support organic farmers and their sustainable agricultural practices is to increase demand for their products. This week, a survey will go out to 2,200 Kaiser Permanente employees working in the 1800 Harrison building in downtown Oakland to assess their interest in the weekly delivery of organic fruits and vegetables directly to their workplace. The organic farmers currently serving our Oakland Medical Center would bring extra food for subscribers at 1800 Harrison. The food would be distributed in boxes or bags in the lobby during the hours of operation of our Friday Fresh Farmers' Market. This has the potential to significantly leverage the farmers' time and greatly benefit our employees' health and wellness. Who knows, maybe 1950 Franklin, Ordway and Kaiser Center would be next?

This week's recipe is a simple salad recognizing the end of stone fruit season and the beginning of citrus season. Either oranges or tangerines work well in this vinaigrette. I completed the personal nutritional analysis in the Lifestyles section of the Thrive website and it told me to eat spinach with tasty vinaigrettes.

Spinach Salad with Sesame-Ginger Vinaigrette

Enough fresh spinach to feed your family and friends
1/4 red onion, thinly sliced

Dressing

2 tsp orange or tangerine zest
2 Tbsp freshly squeezed orange or tangerine juice
2 tsp grated ginger (I peel it and freeze it so I always have some available to use with a grater.)
2-1/2 Tbsp rice wine vinegar
2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 Tbsp dark sesame oil
1 tsp soy sauce
1/4 tsp salt

Mix the dressing. Toss with the spinach, red onion and maybe pieces of citrus fruit and toasted sesame seeds. This is so simple and so tasty.

The Healthy Living link on all our physician homepages and at kp.org takes you to a link to Health Calculators. One of the calculators helps assess your daily intake of calcium. Even males need calcium for healthy bones. I wasn't getting quite enough and found that eating beans could help. You may be able to get most of the ingredients at your local farmers' market, but you may also need to stop at a grocery store.

Not only is this spicy black bean soup good for you, it is incredibly delicious. You can vary the "heat" to suit you, your family and friends. The recipe is simple and quick.

Spicy Black Bean Soup with Cumin & Jalapeño

2 Tbsp olive oil
 1 onion, diced
 1 medium carrot, diced
 4 large garlic cloves, minced
 2 tsp ground cumin
 1 to 2 tsp finely chopped jalapeño chili with seeds, divided
 (Don't rub your eyes after doing this.)
 2 cans black beans, including liquid
 4 medium tomatoes, diced (save the juice)
 1-1/2 cups low-salt chicken broth
 Chopped fresh cilantro
 Chopped scallions
 Crumbled feta cheese

In a large soup pot, heat the oil. Cook the onion, carrot and garlic until soft. Mix in the cumin and 1 tsp jalapeño. Add the beans, tomatoes with juice, and broth. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer for about 15 minutes. Transfer three cups to a blender, purée until smooth and return to the pot. Simmer a little more until slightly thickened. Season to taste by adding a little salt, pepper and jalapeño at a time and taste frequently so you aren't surprised. Ladle into bowls and garnish as you wish. Every cup of beans provides about 90mg of calcium toward the 1,200 mg per day you need.

I had the privilege to meet with physician and health plan leaders in the Washington D.C. area of the Mid-Atlantic States Kaiser Permanente region to explore the possibility of creating two KP farmers' markets there. The actual model of the markets may be different than some of our markets in California and elsewhere. There is a very strong commitment to make their markets a focal point for change in the health of the surrounding communities as well as serving as a resource for staff and members. I believe we will learn from the people I met.

Preliminary results from our first KP farmer's market survey are in. Eleven hundred shoppers from 12 markets in three states were polled. About 60% of shoppers said they were eating more fruits and vegetables and more different kinds of fruits and vegetables specifically because of the KP markets. The other 40% are already eating a lot or they really don't like fruits and veggies.

You can get the vegetables for this week's recipe at your local farmers' market. I had extra jalapeños leftover after making last week's soup and found this terrific recipe for stuffed poblano chilis. Two oz of cheese divided between four to five chilis keeps the saturated fat to a minimum.

Stuffed & Roasted Poblano Chilis

- 4 medium poblano chilis, halved lengthwise and seeded
- 3/4 cup fresh corn kernels (Stand the ear up in a deep bowl when you cut the kernels off so they don't jump all over your floor.)
- 1/4 cup diced red onion
- 1/4 cup diced celery
- 1/4 cup diced red pepper
- 2 Tbsp chopped cilantro
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and chopped
- 2 oz sharp cheddar cheese, grated
- 1 Tbsp dried breadcrumbs (optional)
- 1/2 tsp salt
- Freshly ground pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 375°. Lightly oil a baking sheet. Mix all ingredients except the poblanos then stuff them. Arrange them on the baking sheet and bake for about 30 minutes until the peppers are tender and the stuffing is hot. This a flavorful side dish.

11/11/05

Loel Solomon is one of the leaders in our national KP Community Benefits program. He has enough energy to light up half of San Leandro. With two little kids, he and his wife are often too busy to cook. He told me I needed to include the cooking time and the number of pans any recipe requires. This week's recipe for a light and fresh soup requires one pan and 30 minutes or less, depending on whether or not someone can help chop.

Statistics recently became available that showed the "open" rate of the recipe of the week by the 1,200 or so subscribers from outside of the Oakland Medical Center. On average, the e-mails are opened about 45% of the time, which is evidently a reasonable rate for bulk e-mails. One recipe was opened by more than 50% so I eagerly looked back to see which one it was. Oh well, it was for the Homemade Pizza Crust.

Mexican Lime Soup

Serves 6

2 Tbsp olive oil
6 garlic cloves, sliced
6 small, skinless, boneless chicken breasts or thighs
(slightly more fat), cut into 1/2" strips
2 tsp dried oregano
1-1/2 tsp ground cumin
8 cups low-salt chicken broth
1/3 cup fresh lime juice
Kernels from one ear of corn
2 avocados, peeled, pitted and diced
3 tomatoes, chopped
4 green onions, sliced
Fresh cilantro, chopped
1 jalapeño, seeded and minced
Lime slices

Heat the oil in a large, heavy soup pot. Add garlic and stir briefly. Add chicken, oregano and cumin. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Sauté for 4 to 5 minutes. Add broth and lime juice and bring to a simmer. Reduce heat and simmer. After about 3 minutes, add the corn kernels. Simmer 5 more minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Adjust seasonings.

Ladle soup into bowls. Garnish with all the chopped, minced and diced items. Those hungering for carbs may add crushed tortilla chips or cooked rice. This is a great recipe to use for a "leftover" dinner. (Reheat the soup, chop the fresh toppings during the reheat time and eat.)

I had often shopped at farmers' markets before one came to our hospital in 2003, but I was never as aware of the rhythm of week-to-week changes in the availability of fresh food. Getting to know the farmers who grow my food has been a privilege. What I can touch, smell and taste at the market is the end result of a lot of work that is far different than what I know at the hospital.

Dr. Ted Tsukayama, an internist and expert in pharmacy and therapeutics, gave me the gift of a wonderful book by David Mas Masumoto called "Epitaph for a Peach." The author is a farmer in California's Central Valley who went away to college but was drawn back to farming. The book describes his yearlong attempt to keep his sweet and juicy Sun Crest peaches alive and to begin the conversion to organic farming.

A quote: "I remember a Japanese saying about the power of bamboo. Its strength is not found in a rigid structure that blocks the wind; instead, the stalks bend with the wind. Their power resides in their very flexibility. I'm working on becoming like bamboo. I've abandoned my attempts to control and compete with nature, but letting go has been a challenge." After reading this book, I look at our market's weekly offerings with even more gratitude.

After three weeks of jalapeños, it's time for a change of pace. Pick up a Napa cabbage, some scallions and a red bell pepper at your market as the foundation for an easy stir fry that takes 30 minutes or less. Consider adding a wok to your kitchen if you don't cook with one already. It can be heated very hot and works well for this kind of cooking.

Shrimp with Napa Cabbage & Ginger

- 1 lb shrimp, shelled and deveined (There are inexpensive plastic tools available at fish markets that make shelling and deveining shrimp simple.)
- 1 bunch scallions
- 2 Tbsp cooking sherry
- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 1/4 tsp white pepper
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 big head Napa cabbage, quartered lengthwise, cored and chopped into 1-1/2" pieces

2 tbsp canola oil
1-1/2 tsp minced or grated fresh ginger (Tip: a peeled, frozen piece of ginger grates easily.)
1 red bell pepper, cut into 1/4" strips
1 Tbsp soy sauce
Cooked rice

Begin cooking the rice.

In a medium bowl, toss the shrimp with 1 Tbsp sherry, cornstarch, white pepper and salt.

Slice the white part and pale green part of the scallions into 2" long pieces then thinly slice the dark green part. (This is another recipe that doesn't waste most of the scallion.) Rinse the cabbage in a colander.

Heat a wok or heavy skillet over high heat until just smoking. Add 1 Tbsp oil and heat until smoking. Stir fry shrimp until they begin to brown. Set aside in a clean bowl.

Reheat the wok and add the remaining tablespoon of oil. When just smoking, stir fry the ginger and 2" scallion pieces for a couple minutes. Add the red pepper and stir fry for about 2 more minutes until it begins to soften. Add the remaining sherry and cook until it evaporates. Add the Napa cabbage, still wet from the colander, and 1 Tbsp soy sauce. Cover and cook about 5 minutes until the cabbage is tender. Add the cooked shrimp and cook uncovered for about a minute. Sweep in the dark green sliced scallion and serve over rice. Be proud of yourself for having tried a new type of cabbage.

Farmers' markets at hospitals are subject to different biorhythms than the usual community market. Our market will be closed on the Friday after Thanksgiving because of the greatly reduced numbers of staff and patients on site that day. For those cooking a Thanksgiving dinner, this week's mashed potato recipe can help reduce the overall calorie load due to fat. Even though there are only a couple of grams of fat per serving, they are still very tasty.

If, in the past, you wore Birkenstocks and named your child "Redwood Hottub Tuolomne," make this recipe without peeling the potatoes. If you grew up with the BeeGees, go ahead and peel them. Either way, the recipe uses one pot and takes about 20 minutes.

Mashed Potatoes

- 4 russet potatoes, about 2 lbs, peeled or unpeeled, and cut into chunks (I cut them in half lengthwise, cut each half lengthwise into thirds then cut crosswise about every inch.)
- 3 Tbsp nonfat sour cream
- 3 Tbsp reduced fat butter
- Skim milk as needed
- 1 tsp salt
- 1-1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 Tbsp parsley, chopped (optional)

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the potatoes. (I used to add the potatoes to the cold water. I was told that the potatoes got too mushy outside before cooking inside.) Bring to a boil, then simmer for about 15 minutes or until tender. Drain the potatoes well in a colander. Return them to the pot. Add the sour cream, butter, salt, pepper and garlic. Mash with a potato masher. Add a little skim milk at a time until you achieve a desired lumpy consistency. If you like smooth potatoes, use your electric mixer. Mix in the optional parsley. This recipe works well also with Yukon Gold potatoes which have a creamy, buttery texture.

On Thursday November 17th, Kaiser Permanente hosted the first FoodMed conference along with Healthcare Without Harm, Catholic Healthcare West, and Physicians for Social Responsibility. Growing out of Kaiser Permanente's expanding farmers' market and overall food policy initiatives, 280 people from health care and sustainable agriculture organizations around the country exchanged learning from the past and visions for the future of our food system.

Kaiser Permanente is big enough to have a significant impact on our local food system. It's all about linking existing demand with supply. I will write more about this in future market updates.

Apropos to this week's recipe, I had the privilege to speak to an expert in sustainable seafood issues recently. She referred me to the Monterey Bay Aquarium' Seafood Watch website at www.seafoodwatch.org. Check it out. What we do with our forks on a daily basis affects the broader ecosystem. This week's recipe features ahi tuna, which meets the criteria on the website.

Ahi Tuna with Fennel & Red Peppers

Serves 2

Two 6-oz tuna steaks
 2 Tbsp olive oil
 1 Tbsp fennel seeds
 1-1/2 tsp black peppercorns
 1 medium fennel bulb, cut crosswise into 1/4" slices
 1 red bell pepper, sliced into 1/4" slices
 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
 1/2 cup water
 1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice

Lightly brush the tuna steaks with olive oil. Crush the fennel seeds and peppercorns with a mortar and pestle (or smash them in a bag with the bottom of a skillet.) Press into both sides of the tuna and let rest.

Sauté the fennel in the oil until golden. Add bell pepper and garlic and sauté for about a minute more. Add water and simmer covered for about 10 minutes or until the fennel is tender. Remove the lid and boil until the liquid is almost evaporated. Season with lemon juice, salt and pepper. Keep warmed.

In a heavy skillet over moderately high heat, add a little oil and sear the tuna steaks about 2 minutes on each side or until barely pink in the center. Serve with the fennel and red pepper mixture spooned over the steaks. This is low fat, tasty, quick and healthy.

Months ago I got over being intimidated by butternut squash and recently embraced acorn squash also. This may not seem like a big deal to some, but I never had a clue what to do with these multicolored, corrugated vegetables. Together, these squash make a fantastic soup perfect with a mixed green salad on a cold, rainy night. There are surprise ingredients to provide brightness and depth to the flavor. Happy Boy Farm offers these "hard squash" each Friday, probably only into January.

This recipe is not one to be made after work for busy families, but best created if you have time on a day off. It took me 1 hour and 26 minutes total elapsed time in the kitchen, though not all was spent on the soup preparation. It requires more than one pot.

Two Squash Winter Soup

- 1 butternut squash, halved lengthwise and seeded
- 1 acorn squash, halved lengthwise and seeded
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and left whole
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 1 leek, white part, diced
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 3 cups vegetable broth
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 2 Tbsp apple cider vinegar (one surprise)
- 2 Tbsp maple syrup (the other surprise)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Preheat the oven to 350° for at least 30 minutes. Brush the squash with a little olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and place cut side down on a baking sheet. Hide a clove of garlic and a sprig of thyme in the cavity under each half. Roast the squash until fork tender and a little caramelized, about 35 to 45 minutes.

While the squash is roasting, add a little olive oil to a heavy soup pot and "sweat" (cool term real chefs use) the onion, celery and leek for about 10 minutes until

soft, but not brown. Meanwhile, in another pot, heat the broth with the cinnamon stick to boiling, then simmer while diced vegetables are cooking.

I found that scooping out the roasted squash the most difficult step as it was very hot to handle. After combinations of messy hot pads, oven mitts and a kitchen towel, I settled on holding the squash down with a wooden spoon, so as not to tear the skin too much, and scraping the flesh out with a sharp knife. If anyone out there has a better way, please share it with me and I will pass it on. Add the squash flesh and roasted garlic to the soup pot with the other vegetables. Add 4 cups of hot broth and the cinnamon stick. Simmer the soup for about 15 minutes. Add more hot broth to reach desired consistency. I left it on the thick side.

Purée the soup in batches. If you are using a blender, make sure the top is on tight. Strain the soup through a sieve into a clean pot, pushing it through with a large spoon. Add the apple cider vinegar and the maple syrup, then season to taste with salt and pepper. This soup is amazing. I admit to serving it with croutons.

A recent conference call with about 75 Kaiser Permanente farmers' market organizers and supporters from 22 markets in five states was the forum for an update on the creativity of our colleagues. The markets are being used as a focal point for change. Santa Teresa's mobile cooking demonstrations have gone to 25 sites and more are planned for 2006. L.A.'s South Bay facility is continuing the cooking classes for kids at the YMCA and is helping to create community gardens. Denver's short seasonal market (they're not open now and are jealous) hosted different educational booths at each market during the summer. While the "Ask a Nutritionist" booth was appreciated, Free Chair Massage Day got the most business. Portland's market has 1,200 shoppers per week and the hospital's cafeteria buys from the market for the salad bar.

Of more than 1,200 shoppers at 17 of our markets, 71% of repeat shoppers reported eating more fruits and vegetables because of the existence of the Kaiser Permanente markets. It seems putting fresh, tasty food right in front of people entices them to try new foods. There were many more stories and exciting future possibilities reported on the conference call, however, these stories will stop if the markets don't survive long-term. Some of the focus of next year's work will be to create new ways to help support the small and mid-size family farms who direct market at Kaiser Permanente. Hopefully, you can support your local farmers' market, whether or not it is at Kaiser Permanente.

This week's recipe uses some market ingredients and some grocery store ingredients. It uses one pot and one bowl. I don't have a clue how long it takes because I was listening to music while cooking. Pick a really cold night and make this. This recipe is rich, spicy and liberates you from the usual all-red chili.

Chicken and White Bean Chili

- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 1 large green pepper, diced
- 8 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1/3 jalapeño, seeded and minced
- 1-1/2 lb boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1/2" pieces
- 3-1/2 Tbsp chili powder (There are actually measuring spoons with a 1/2 tablespoon in the set. Find one and you won't regret it.)

2 Tbsp tomato paste
1 Tbsp ground cumin
1 Tbsp dried oregano
1 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
2 (15-oz) cans cannellini beans, drained, juices reserved
1 (28-oz) can diced tomatoes in juice (I like Muir Glen organic)
1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
Salt and pepper

In a large soup pot, sauté the onion, pepper, garlic and jalapeño in a little olive oil until the vegetables begin to soften, about 5 minutes. Meanwhile, scrape the visible fat off the chicken thighs before cutting them up. Drain the beans in a colander, reserving the liquid. Set the cooked vegetables aside in the colander with the beans.

Salt and pepper the chicken. Sauté it in a little more olive oil until the outside is no longer pink (or whatever color it was to start with.) Mix in the chili powder, tomato paste, cumin and oregano. Add the beans, the cooked vegetables, tomatoes with juice and one cup of the reserved bean juice.

Simmer about 25 minutes. If it's too thick, add more bean juice. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Mix in the cilantro and serve. I can't even begin to tell you how tasty this is.

The colors at the farmer's markets have changed from reds and yellows to deep greens and oranges thus this week's simple, fresh and tasty recipe. This recipe also gives you the chance to determine how many "stars" your family and friends would give your kitchen. If it got Michelin's 3 stars, there would be no pith anywhere to be seen on the orange segments. I may have only gotten 3/4 of a star.

As a follow up to my request for roasted squash advice, there were two main themes in the responses. Bake it and let it cool before scooping it out (I should've thought of that) or peel it, cut it into chunks, toss with olive oil and roast. I can't envision peeling an acorn squash however.

Spinach Salad with Oranges & Almonds

- 6 Tbsp canola oil
- 4 Tbsp fresh orange juice (organic navels are great)
- 3 scallions, white and light green parts minced
- 3 Tbsp unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 1 Tbsp fresh tarragon, minced
- 2 tsp orange zest
(Remember the Microplane® grater that can make your day.)
- 4 oranges
- Enough fresh spinach for six people, washed well and dried
- 1/2 cup sliced almonds, toasted by tossing in a skillet

This is the defining moment: peel the oranges and over a bowl, remove the pith from the outside and separate the segments removing however much of the membranes you can tolerate. Mix the first seven ingredients. Toss the orange segments with the spinach and dressing in a large salad bowl. Top with the toasted almonds. The flavor of the oranges makes a big difference here. Sample them at your favorite farmers' market before deciding to try this recipe.

12/29/05

The winter solstice is my favorite day of the year. Just when we are getting used to being in the dark, cold and soggy, there is a little more light each and every day. The arrival of asparagus and strawberries at your local farmers' market is not far behind.

For the last recipe offered in 2005, I took our Thrive posters to heart. "I scream, you scream, we all scream for green beans", fennel, cipollini onions and Russian fingerling potatoes. While these ingredients are usually available at Happy Boy Farm at the Oakland market, the market will be closed on Friday, December 30th as many of the hospital staff will be on vacation.

Preheat your oven to 425° and be prepared for a hot, crispy, complex-flavored side dish for whatever else you like to eat.

Roasted Solstice Vegetables

The amounts are up to you. Get whatever seems right for the number of people you are feeding.

- Russian fingerling potatoes
- Cipollini onions (incredibly sweet when roasted)
- Green beans
- Fennel bulbs
- Some fennel seeds
- Sprinkling of dried thyme
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 425°. Cut the potatoes into approximately 3/4" pieces. Cut the cipollini onions into quarters, then peel and be slightly annoyed that they aren't as easy to peel as a regular yellow onion. Stem the beans. Cut off and discard the green stalk of the fennel. Quarter the bulb lengthwise and remove the core. Make the fennel pieces similar in size to the potatoes. Toss all but the green beans in a big bowl with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Mix in some fennel seeds and dried thyme. Spread out in a single layer in a large roasting pan. Roast for about 30 minutes. Stir around in the pan. Add the green beans tossed with a little olive oil and roast for about another 15 minutes until the white veggies are brown and crispy. You are going to like this.

Happy New Year! Sugar crops will soon grace the trees and vines.