

Dr. Preston Maring's Farmers' Market Update & Recipe of the Week Newsletters Volume 9

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People regularly ask me about the cost of food at farmers' markets. In many instances, the prices of comparable fruits and vegetables from a grocery store are more expensive. Organically grown heads of red leaf lettuce may cost \$2.99 at the store and \$1.50 at the farmers' market. Organically grown heirloom tomatoes are less than \$3 per pound at the market but \$5.99 at a grocery store near me. Peaches may cost 40 percent more at the store. You rarely know which farmer grew the food you buy at a store. You can often meet and talk with the farmer at the market. The food at the market was probably picked the day before you get it so it even lasts longer in your refrigerator. You don't have to pay for marketing, packaging, and transport of the food from thousands of miles away.

Clearly, farmers' market food may not be able to compete pound for pound with food you can buy at fast food outlets. The buns, the beef, even the high fructose corn syrup in the ketchup in those convenient little packages--many of which get discarded unopened--all benefit from the Farm Bill subsidies. The cost is kept down because of the government payments and the food is cheap. The price you pay, however, is not reflective of the true cost of the food. Long term, we all have to at least consider how the food was grown as well as the broader effects on the environment. Organically grown local food reduces harm to the planet. And it is good for you and your children.

So go to your local market and bring home a bag of cucumbers. Most of the varieties I have seen at the local markets are not shiny and waxed. You can eat them without peeling. Now, get ready to enjoy a chilled cucumber soup.

Chilled Cucumber Soup

Serves 4

2 big cucumbers, about 24 ounces total. I really like the contorted Armenian cucumbers.
 1 small clove garlic, peeled and coarsely chopped
 2 cups nonfat plain yogurt
 1/2 cup nonfat milk
 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 1 1/4 teaspoons salt

Garnish:

Diced tomato
Diced cucumber
Chopped mint
Optional curry oil (this is a great addition but the soup is fine without it)
2 tablespoon olive oil
1/2 tablespoon curry powder
1/2 tablespoon ground cumin
1/4 tablespoon crushed red pepper

Puree the first 6 ingredients. Chill at least 2 hours before serving. Dice and chop the garnish. If you decide to try the curry oil, heat the oil, curry powder, cumin, and red pepper in a small skillet over low heat for about 3 minutes. Strain it.

Garnish the soup as desired and drizzle a little of the curry oil artistically over the garnish. This one is good for company as it feels special.

Health Care Without Harm is a coalition of over 450 organizations in 50 countries working to transform the health care environment so it is no longer a source of pollution. Major areas of work include elimination of mercury, PVCs (commonly known as vinyl), and other chemicals in the environment; proper management of medical waste; and construction of "green" health care facilities. More recently the organization has partnered with health care to focus on healthy food in the hospital environment. Because Kaiser Permanente has taken the lead in reducing the use of toxic substances in our hospitals and promoting healthy food choices, our program takes an active role in sharing what we've learned with other health care systems. Recently in Boston about 150 people gathered at the second FoodMed conference to examine all parts of the food chain and supply systems for hospitals. Many different health care systems were represented. There's a long way to go before a tipping point is reached. In a survey of over 200 institutions, 40 percent of the hospitals that responded still have fast food restaurants in the lobby. Availability drives food choices. A study by a young doctor from Boston showed, simply, that if McDonald's or Krispy Kreme is close by in the lobby, people will eat there.

At more than 38 Kaiser Permanente facilities nationwide, you have alternative choices. Fresh peaches are here and bell peppers aren't far behind.

I attended the conference to talk to other health care systems about what they could do at their hospitals and haven't had access to a kitchen or a farmers' market this week. This week's recipe is the first one in four years I haven't tried first, but I did eat it at a West Berkeley restaurant. It is so basic and wonderful that I am absolutely confident it will be great without even trying it first at home.

Cucumber, Arugula, Red Onion, and Mint Salad with Lemon Vinaigrette and Feta

Serves 4 (the amounts below are a guess based on limited experience and the looks of the salad at the restaurant--you can modify this however you think best)

- 2 cucumbers, thinly sliced
- 2 cups arugula, sliced
- 1/2 cup fresh mint, slivered
- 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 ounces feta cheese, crumbled

Vinaigrette

2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 small clove garlic, mashed with

1/2 teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

More salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Toss the veggies together in a bowl. Whisk the garlic into the lemon juice in a small bowl. Whisk in the olive oil. Adjust the seasoning. Toss the veggies with dressing. Top each serving with crumbled feta

Ensuring patient safety is a front-and-center issue in health care. There are many different initiatives addressing all aspects of the care people receive in hospitals. An important component of the program is making sure there is absolute clarity of communication about prescribed medications and dosages. In the past, we used "cc" as an abbreviation for cubic centimeters, a measure of volume (for example, "Please give 500cc of normal saline intravenously"). However, cc when handwritten can look like additional zeroes and cause a real problem. We used to write "5.0 mg" when we meant 5 milligrams. Imagine the potential consequence of not seeing the period and thinking the order was for 50 milligrams. We no longer use trailing zeroes.

The recipe of the week e-mails take a team of people to produce. The double-check system in place failed to catch the error some of you probably noticed in the chilled cucumber soup recipe from July 5. A corrected version was e-mailed to the over 10,500 subscribers. I hope not too many people wasted good ingredients because of the error. We will be looking carefully at our processes with the goal of avoiding future occurrences like this.

This week's offering was inspired by a colleague who sent me an article on building a better salad. I have tried multiple versions of this over time. With ingredients fresh from your local market, you can't go wrong.

Mix-and-Match Salad with Red Wine Vinaigrette

Obviously, portions are variable. The vinaigrette dresses a salad for four.

Choose ingredients from each of the 4 columns below.

GREENS

Lettuces
Arugula
Watercress
Mesclun
Butter lettuce
Spinach
Dandelion leaves*

LEAN PROTEIN

Hard-boiled eggs
Chicken breast
Firm tofu
Black or red beans
Wild salmon
Sardines

* I used to dig these up as weeds—times have changed.

COLOR

Radishes
Berries
Bell peppers
Carrots
Tomatoes
Sprouts
Red onions
Cucumbers

EXTRAS

Cheese
Whole grain croutons
Seeds
Avocado
Nuts
Toasted tortilla strips

Red Wine Vinaigrette

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon finely minced shallot
6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Freshly ground pepper to taste

Whisk the vinegar, mustard, salt, and shallot together in a small bowl. Let stand about 5 minutes. Whisk in the olive oil. Add pepper to taste. Dress your beautiful salad creation and enjoy. Of course, you can use any other dressing recipe you like.

Recently I had the privilege of talking to about 200 people who attended the annual Alameda County Community Food Bank Conference. The attendees were the frontline volunteers and staff who serve 40,000 people each week in our community, fewer than 40 percent of whom have any income. Fourteen thousand of those served are children, and another 7,000 are senior citizens. The Food Bank no longer provides soda and other junk food, and the proportion of food provided consisting of various kinds of produce has risen from 8 percent to almost 40 percent. Their motto is "Banking on good nutrition--healthy people, healthy communities." Their distribution facility is large and complex. Their leaders are dedicated and inspiring. The experience has certainly started me thinking about additional ways to get good food into the community.

This week's recipe is a version of potato salad very different from the usual mayonnaise-laden fare. It's fragrant, delicious, and can be served hot, warm, or at room temperature. I was fortunate to find rose potatoes from Full Belly Farm (this farm, by the way, has contributed food over time to the Food Bank). Any little, red new potatoes can work.

Red New Potato Salad with Sautéed Onions, Shallots, and Garlic

2 pounds red new potatoes, boiled and quartered
1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
1 large shallot, minced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
3 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 cup sherry vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste

Cover the potatoes with cold water in a large pot with a cover. Salt the water a little. Leaving the cover on, bring the water to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer until the potatoes are tender but not falling apart, about 15 to 20 minutes. (I never used to cover pans of water when waiting for it to boil. My son and I did a test using the same amount of water at the same temperature with the same heat covered and uncovered. The water came to a boil about 8 percent faster in the covered pot.) Meanwhile, sauté the onions in the olive oil over medium high heat

until they are lightly browned. This takes a while. Add the shallots, garlic, and sauté for about a minute. Turn off the heat at this point. Drain the potatoes when they are done. Have a cooking partner dry each one with a paper towel and hand them to you one at a time to quarter while they are hot. This step gives meaning to the aphorism. Reheat the onions and garlic. Add the sherry vinegar to this mixture. Mix it up, then toss it with the hot potatoes and parsley in a large bowl. It's important to toss the salad while it is warm, as the potatoes soak up the flavors. Salt and pepper to taste. You may never think the same way about potato salad again.