



COOKING FRESH

BY DAVA PARR

SPRINGTIME IN THE ROCKIES

Spring is no doubt beautiful in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, although it can be so painstakingly slow in the unfurling of its grandeur. I always find “mud season” to be one of the longest dry spells for fresh cuisine. The winter keepers have started to rot and the cold ground has yet to warm enough to produce anything edible. On that note, I have taken the liberty to present you with one recipe for each month, in a culinary attempt to pacify your taste buds and souls until late spring and summertime, when the food is much more abundant in our frozen valleys.

WHAT'S IN SEASON?

EARLY SPRING

Chard
Kale
Lettuce
Mustard
Spinach

LATE SPRING

Arugula Mustard
Asparagus Parsley
Broccoli Rabe Peas
Carrots Radishes
Chard Sorrel
Cilantro Spinach
Dill Strawberries
Kale Turnips
Lettuce

Eggs and dairy are more plentiful as well



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FEBRUARY

TRI-TIP ROAST

Located at the bottom of the sirloin, the tri-tip (or triangle roast) is inexpensive for a grass-finished, local option (roughly \$5 to \$7 a pound). It has great flavor when cooked medium-rare. Sliced thin, it's as tender as a New York strip cut.

Dry Rub for Meat

If you don't have all these spices on hand, omit those that you don't have or aren't fond of and/or add others that you would like to include. Be creative, but be forewarned — many times I wish I had written down a certain blend that I conjured out of necessity or whim on the spot!

1 tablespoon smoked paprika
1 tablespoon cumin seed
1 tablespoon fennel seed

2 teaspoons mustard seed
1 tablespoon ground coriander
2 tablespoons chili powder
3 tablespoons paprika
1 tablespoon oregano
1 teaspoon rosemary
1 teaspoon thyme
2 teaspoons black pepper
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper or cayenne
3 tablespoons coarse sea salt
3 tablespoons brown sugar or Sucanat

Option: I recommend lightly toasting the first 7 ingredients in a dry pan before adding the rest. Store in a glass pint jar with lid.

Tri-Tip Roast

2 tablespoons rub mixture from above
2 to 2½ pounds tri-tip roast

Place 2 tablespoons of the rub mixture and tri-tip roast into a one gallon plastic bag. Shake well to coat. Let marinate at room temperature for a few hours.

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Place meat on a rack in a roasting pan and roast uncovered for 10-12 minutes per pound, the result should be a nice medium-rare. You may also roast until the thermometer reads 120 degrees when placed in the fattest part of the roast. Remove from oven and let rest away from the heat for at least 15 minutes before slicing. Tri-tip is best sliced thinly, across the grain.

This is also a great cut of meat to throw on the grill. Serves nicely with a cabbage slaw, grilled corn tortillas, fresh pico de gallo, and in August, with corn on the cob.



MARCH

TENDER SPRING SALAD WITH CHAMPAGNE VINAIGRETTE

Serves 4

This is a rough template for a March salad. Nature is the Queen of Whimsy and she may not fully cooperate with my suggestions. Then again she may have much, much more to offer. Please don't limit yourself to my suggestions. The point is to snatch them out of the ground with wild abandon as the green leaves start unfurling in your (or your neighbor's) garden and eat them before they can get all defensive!

Salad

8 to 10 ounces of tender spring greens and herbs (baby lettuces, spinach, miner's lettuce, arugula, sorrel, mustard, baby beet tops, plus cilantro, dill, parsley or chives)

Young garlic and onion greens, julienned

A handful of pea blossoms, if you can find them

Baby carrots or radishes, chopped

Combine everything into a bowl of cold water and let soak a few minutes. Spin until dry and serve with vinaigrette below.

Champagne Vinaigrette

1 tablespoon champagne vinegar

1 teaspoon Dijon or stone-ground mustard

1 small clove garlic, crushed

2 tablespoons olive oil

Blend first 3 ingredients in a bowl with a wire whisk. Slowly whisk in the oil.

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APRIL

POACHED EGGS WITH STEAMED ASPARAGUS AND CRISPY BACON

Serves 3 or 4

This is a fast and amazing breakfast to be had in April and May when wild and domesticated asparagus come alive.

Look for wild asparagus growing along fence lines and irrigation ditches. Remember the spot and you can find asparagus there year after year. Please be mindful of other motorists if you pull off the road when you spot the telltale signs of tall asparagus ferns. I can't tell you how many accidents I have almost caused!

½ pound of good bacon
1 pound asparagus
¼ teaspoon vinegar
6 farm eggs, room temperature
Sea salt
Fresh ground black pepper
6 pats organic butter

Frying the bacon: Lay bacon flat in a cast iron skillet over medium heat. Using a grease splatter net is a great idea or lid half-cocked over the top to allow steam to escape. Cook until desired crispness. Drain excess grease and keep warm.

Steaming the asparagus: I like to steam my asparagus in a half-inch of water in a sauté pan with a lid. If you have one of those asparagus steamers at your disposal, by all means break it out.

Poaching the eggs: In a small to medium sized pot, bring about 2 inches of water to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer. Add vinegar. Gently crack an egg into a small teacup or measuring cup. Carefully slide egg from cup into the water until you have a few eggs in the pot. Do not overcrowd. Cover pot with a lid and turn off the flame. You will have medium-firm eggs in 3 minutes. With a slotted spoon, remove eggs from pot so water can drain.

Serving the dish: Place eggs on top of asparagus and season with salt and pepper. Top with a pat of butter. Lay crispy bacon alongside and devour!



MAY

STRAWBERRY FOOL IN PINE NUT/PECAN CRUST

Serves 6

Yummm. Sweet and simple and best eaten out of the pie pan with an overly large spoon!

Pine Nut/Pecan Crust

2 ½ cups pine nuts and pecans, mixed
¼ teaspoon cinnamon
⅓ cup Sucanat*
4 tablespoons salted butter, melted

In a food processor, pulse nuts, cinnamon and Sucanat together. Pour in melted butter and pulse again. Press mixture into the bottom and sides of a pie pan and refrigerate for half an hour or more. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake until very lightly browned, about 12 minutes. Cool before adding filling.

Strawberry Filling

4 cups fresh strawberries
2 cups whipping cream
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ cup organic sugar or agave, to taste
Fresh mint sprigs for garnish (optional)

Wash the strawberries, reserving 6 of the prettiest for garnish. Macerate with a potato masher until just starting to lose their shape. Whip the cream until it holds soft peaks. Add vanilla extract and sugar to taste, whip lightly until combined. Fold in strawberries and spoon onto baked crust. Let chill for one hour. Garnish each slice with a strawberry and mint sprig.

**Sucanat (a contraction of "Sugar Cane Natural") is a nonrefined cane sugar. Unlike refined and processed white sugar, Sucanat retains its molasses content; it is essentially pure, dried, sugar cane juice. Sucanat is generally accepted as a substitute for brown sugar and ranks the highest in nutritional value, containing less sucrose than white cane sugar.*

Chef Dava owns and operates a local foods company in Paonia. She delivers fresh, organic, or sustainably grown produce and meats to restaurants and homes in the Roaring Fork Valley, from Aspen to Glenwood Springs. Go online for easy ordering and more recipes at www.freshandwyld.com.