

Chef welcomes ever-changing options

Field of greens



Versatility is one of the many things chef Tom McNary appreciates about greens.

Tom McNary finds it easy being green. In fact, greens are a go-to ingredient for this longtime chef.

"I enjoy eating fresh greens and cooked greens as well," said McNary, executive chef of Soif, a Santa Cruz restaurant and wine bar. "I have greens on my menu all the time, whether it be chard, whether it be kale, whether it be dandelion. We use them in a lot of different ways."

And they change with the seasons.

McNary said he appreciates the contrast from the hardier, bitter greens of winter—think escarole and radicchio—to the milder greens that hit their stride in summer, such as Little Gem, with its crisp texture and sweet flavor.

"It's all about seasonality, so that's what interests me so much about greens, what I can do with them in the restaurant setting," he said.

If pressed, McNary lists arugula and frisée as his two favorite leafy vegetables, but hints at the benefits of seeking new and unfamiliar choices.

"Greens are very versatile," he said. "You can really play around and experiment."

A lifelong Californian, McNary said he feels fortunate to have a ready supply of locally grown greens—and scores of other fruits and vegetables—available throughout the year and often picked the same day he uses them.

"As each season comes around, I get excited to work with what I have," he said.

McNary, who shops at a farmers market twice a week for the restaurant, said buying local is important to him "because I know where it's grown, I know who's growing it, I know when it's harvested."

"That's the way I've been eating all my life, even before I actually became a cook," he said. "It's second nature to me." 🌿

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SPRING VEGETABLE SOUP with crème fraîche and mint

This easy-to-make dish—Tom McNary's take on the classic minted pea soup—is rich and flavorful, but won't weigh you down.

Serves 4

- 1/2 cup sliced yellow onion*
- 1/2 cup sliced leeks*
- 3 stalks green garlic, white part only, sliced*
- 2 tbsp. butter*
- 2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil*
- 1/2 cup cubed new potato*
- 3 to 4 cups vegetable stock*
- 2 cups shelled English peas*
- 1 cup packed spinach leaves*
- 1/2 cup shelled and shucked fava beans*
- 1/2 head butter lettuce*
- 2 tbsp. mint leaves, plus a few extra leaves for garnish*
- 1/4 cup cream*
- 1/4 cup crème fraîche, plus 2 tbsp. for garnish*
- Salt and pepper, to taste*

Sweat onion, leeks and green garlic in butter, olive oil and 3 tbsp. water over medium heat, covered, for 10 minutes or until soft. Add potato and stock to cover potatoes by 1/2 inch. Simmer until potatoes are soft. Add peas, spinach, fava beans, lettuce and mint leaves. Let simmer until spinach and lettuce are wilted, about 3 to 5 minutes. Puree with an immersion blender. Add cream and 1/4 cup crème fraîche. Season with salt and pepper, and garnish with crème fraîche and mint leaves (torn or julienned).

BEET AND LENTIL SALAD

From the crunch of the walnuts to the peppery zing of the arugula, what's not to love about this colorful salad?

Serves 4

*3 small red beets
(about the size of a golf ball)
3 small gold beets
Salt and olive oil, to taste
1 1/2 cups French green lentils
2 tbsp. each diced carrots, onions and celery
1/2 cup walnut halves
4 to 5 handfuls arugula, washed and dried
1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese*

Preserved lemon vinaigrette (can be made in advance)

*2 tbsp. finely diced shallots
Zest and juice of 2 lemons
1 cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsp. diced preserved lemon peel
Salt and pepper, to taste*

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Wash beets and sprinkle with salt and olive oil. Wrap in foil and bake for 45 minutes or until tender when pierced with a knife. When cool, peel, quarter and set aside. In the meantime, sort lentils. Place in a saucepan with 4 cups water and bring to boil. Reduce to simmer. Add carrots, onions and celery and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes or until lentils are done. Remove from heat, drain and let cool. Place walnuts on a sheet pan and toast in a 350-degree oven until fragrant. Remove and let cool.

In the meantime, prepare vinaigrette by whisking together all ingredients.

To assemble salad, arrange arugula on a platter. Toss lentils and beets with 2/3 of the vinaigrette and season with salt and pepper. Add to platter. Garnish with toasted walnuts and crumbled feta. Serve family style with remaining vinaigrette on the side.



GARDEN LETTUCE SALAD with roasted cherries, fromage blanc and hazelnuts

California cherry season is short but sweet and usually wraps up by the end of June. For this recipe, use any fruit you like. Roasted peaches provide another delicious option.

Serves 4

*1 cup pitted cherries
A few drops of kirsch or Grand Marnier (optional)
1 tbsp. diced shallot
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsp. red wine vinegar
1/4 lb. fromage blanc
4 slices levain bread
4 to 5 oz. mixed baby lettuce, such as baby romaine, red oak leaf, arugula and frisée
1/4 lb. hazelnuts, roasted, skinned and coarsely chopped*



Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Toss cherries in a few drops of olive oil and liquor, if using. Roast for 5 to 7 minutes or until they start to release their juice. Remove from oven and set aside to cool. Mix shallot, 1/4 cup olive oil and vinegar to make vinaigrette. Spread cheese on bread slices and toast in a 450-degree oven for 5 to 8 minutes or until slightly toasted and cheese is soft. Toss lettuces and hazelnuts with vinaigrette. Drizzle cherries and collected juices on salad. Top with bread slices and serve.



SALMON with asparagus, potato, hard-cooked egg and salsa verde

"There are so many things you could put on this salad," McNary said, listing beets, baby turnips and sugar snap peas as options. "It's a stepping-off point where you can go in a lot of different directions."

Serves 4

*4 (4-oz.) wild Pacific king salmon fillets
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 lb. asparagus
1 lb. Yukon gold, fingerling, red rose or new potatoes
1 sprig thyme
1 sprig rosemary
5 cloves garlic, unpeeled
2 tbsp. olive oil
4 to 5 handfuls frisée or arugula
4 to 6 hard-cooked eggs
1/4 to 1/2 cup sliced spring onion
1 cup salsa verde (your favorite, or try McNary's recipe at californiabountiful.com)*

Season salmon with salt and pepper. Grill for 2 to 3 minutes on each side or until desired doneness. Alternatively, roast in a 350-degree oven for 10 to 15 minutes or until done. Cut tough bottoms off asparagus and blanch in boiling salted water for 2 to 4 minutes or until al dente. Shock in ice water to preserve green color.

Wash potatoes and toss with herbs, whole unpeeled garlic cloves, olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste. Place in a roasting pan in a single layer. Cover with aluminum foil and roast in a 350-degree oven for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until you can stick a knife through without resistance. Remove from oven. Discard herbs, but save garlic cloves. Cut potatoes into 1/2-inch slices or wedges.

To plate, place salad greens on a platter. Add asparagus spears, then salmon. Nestle potatoes and halved or quartered hard-cooked eggs around salmon and asparagus. Sprinkle sliced spring onions on top of everything. Drizzle salsa verde over the top or serve on the side. Squeeze roasted garlic cloves for extra flavor.

GREEN GARLIC, GREENS and ricotta ravioli

The filling for this ravioli is lighter than traditional fillings. Green garlic, the immature bulb of garlic, enhances the filling's spring-like flavor profile.

Serves 4

2 bunches green garlic

4 tbsp. butter

3 cups packed mixed greens such as chard, mustard, arugula and/or mizuna

1/2 cup fresh ricotta, well-drained

1/4 cup grated Parmesan

1 tbsp. chopped parsley

1 tsp. chopped thyme

1 egg

Salt and pepper, to taste

Fresh pasta dough (2 to 3 packages of store-bought sheets, or try McNary's recipe at californiabountiful.com)

1 cup mixed wild mushrooms such as chanterelle, morel and black trumpet, cleaned

1 cup chicken or vegetable stock

Cut off roots, green parts and tough outer layer of garlic, then cut in half lengthwise and dice. Sauté in 3 tbsp. butter over moderate heat until soft, about 10 minutes. Turn up heat and add 2 cups greens and cook until wilted. Drain and cool. Squeeze out excess moisture and turn onto a board. Chop mixture until it comes together. Add ricotta, Parmesan, herbs, egg, salt and pepper.

Roll out dough to about 1/16 inch, using preferred method (pasta machine, food processor attachment, etc.). Feed dough through the machine to your desired setting (usually setting of 6 or 7 on a pasta machine). Fill ravioli with heaping teaspoonfuls of filling. Fold dough. Cut and pierce edges to make ravioli. Place in boiling water for 1 to 1 1/2 minutes to seal ravioli and cook it.

In the meantime, cut remaining 1 cup greens into bite-sized pieces. Set aside. In remaining 1 tbsp. butter, sauté mushrooms for 5 minutes or until soft. Add stock and bring to simmer, adding greens and cooking until just wilted. Correct seasoning with salt and pepper. Plate a spoonful of greens and broth over ravioli. Optional garnishes include shaved or grated Parmesan cheese, edible flowers or additional chopped herbs.

Editor's note: *Soif Wine Bar & Merchants temporarily closed its doors in March to offer curbside pickup of food and wine. Check the restaurant's website for updates.*



MORE ONLINE

Chef Tom McNary shares his recipes for salsa verde and fresh pasta dough at www.californiabountiful.com.