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Whatcom Locavore: Try this tatsoi salad with warm vinaigrette recipe

NANCY GING - FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Usually I try to focus each of these articles on a particular theme. This time, though, lots of things are happening having to do with a variety of local food production and availability subjects. Here's the latest news you might want to know about.



First of all, here's a quick update on what you can get at the Bellingham Farmers Market. Several vendors are carrying our local spring delicacy, stinging nettles. Alm Hill Gardens labels them "dangerously delicious!"

Stinging nettles have to be handled carefully while raw - I usually put my hands in a couple of layers of plastic bags. Once cooked, though, they are perfectly safe to handle and eat. They are typically cooked like any other tender green, sauteed or steamed.

Nursery vendors are also gearing up with lots of plant starts for your home garden. I picked up some strawberry plants from Cloud Mountain Farm and browsed some of the other booths with bamboo, herbs, fruits and vegetable starts.

Rabbit Fields Farm had an Asian variety of greens called "tatsoi" which I hadn't tried before. I love nearly all kinds of greens, especially in the spring when they have a tonic effect, so I bought a couple of bunches to try. Tatsoi is delicious, with a flavor that's milder than mustard greens but more flavorful than lettuces. Tatsoi can be eaten raw or cooked. It's the featured ingredient in the recipe below.

Most of the rest of the ingredients at the market were familiar but wonderful - a sturdy assortment of winter potatoes, onions, leeks, and giant beets; various vibrant spring

greens (including garlic greens - yum!); and too many other assorted delights to mention, such as local grains, honey, eggs, radishes, and much more.

There are almost always some talented buskers (street performers) who add extra value to a trip to the Market. For the past couple of weeks a highlight for me has been three young fellows playing guitars and singing Beatles songs. They even dress the part with pegged pants, pointy-toed boots, and similar haircuts. Judging by the number of people I passed walking along singing quietly (or not so quietly) along with them, I'd guess others enjoyed their music as much as I did.

After the Market on Saturday, my family and I took a drive out toward Lynden to visit Farmer Ben's (1461 Van Dyk Road, Lynden, just off Hannegan Road) and buy some nitrite-free local bacon.

Farmer Ben's focuses on pasture raised beef, pork and chicken products that are antibiotic-free, chemical-free and grass fed. Turns out they have two kinds of bacon, both salt cured without nitrites. One is regular belly bacon, the kind most often seen in grocery stores. The other is "cottage" bacon, cut from the pork shoulder.

The cottage bacon slices are a little leaner and about the size of your hand-perfect for sandwiches. We've cooked up some of the bacon already, and it was delicious. Their pork loin chops were also tender and perfect. Farmer Jessica, who runs the farm store, is delightful and the children are charming, too - very eager to show visitors the new piglets and rambunctious chickens. Their hours vary, so call 360-354-8812 first for a recorded message with the week's schedule and product availability. It's spring (i.e., muddy) so take boots if you want to visit the piglets. A full price list is available on their website at myfarmerben.com.

More exciting news on the pork front, especially for those of you who don't buy freezer quantities. For the first time, fresh (not frozen) locally raised pork will be available at local grocery stores - the two Community Food Co-op stores, to be specific. Heritage Lane Farm (Lynden), owned by Craig and Kelly Mayberry, will be supplying the pork. According to their website, the farm's mission is to "promote food biodiversity through the production of rare breed livestock and heirloom vegetables." Their pork is "raised locally in a sustainable manner without pesticides or other commercial production practices." They'll make their first fresh pork delivery to the Co-op later this week.

Craig says, "We use Keizer meats for processing and they will be smoking hams and bacon, but they have to wait a couple of weeks to get one last approval from the USDA so for the moment we will have loin, shoulder roasts, ribs, and ground pork/sausage. Once Keizer is fully approved then we will have smoked bacon and the Cordata store will be selling cooked ham out of their deli and the ham hocks will be used in their deli soups."

He goes on to say, "The intention is to have pork available on a full-time basis. In the short term there is a couple of months this summer when I will not have any and then

after that it should be continuous, depending on sales. We will be delivering a pig a week, which will be about 100-140 lbs of meat. If demand is high enough then it may sell out before we have the next delivery, but we are also increasing production so if demand is high then next year we can deliver more frequently."

Later this year they also plan to provide fresh lamb and turkey. If you like the idea of being able to buy fresh local meat, please visit your nearest co-op location (see Resources below) and support their efforts.

Finally, if you'd like an easy way to get fresh local food each week this summer, don't forget to sign up for a CSA program (Community Supported Agriculture). CSAs offer a way to prepay in the spring for weekly bags or boxes of a variety of farm products throughout the growing season. A list of some available CSAs, pickup locations and prices is available at the service desks in the Community Food Cooperative stores. Additionally, check the 2011 Food & Farm Finder published by Sustainable Connections (also available at the co-op or the Farmers Market).

And here's an idea for employers - how about partnering with a farm and offering CSA subscriptions as a form of employee benefit? Some employers are experimenting with prepaying CSA shares for employees who want them, and allowing employees to pay them back a little at a time over the CSA period with regular paycheck deductions. All shares are delivered to the place of employment, either by the farm or by someone at the company who picks them up.

The result is a benefit program that costs employers almost nothing, gives employees an easy way to get healthy food at optimum prices without having to come up with a large lump sum in advance, and supports small local farmers and the local food economy. The Co-op CSA list indicates farms that have special workplace CSA programs.

Here's the recipe of the week. If you'd like to make it into a hearty one-dish locavore meal, try adding some diced local ham or bacon and some cubed local cheese. Enjoy!

Producers are listed after each ingredient.

TATSOI SALAD WITH WARM VINAIGRETTE

Ingredients

2 eggs (Red Farm Lavender, Ferndale)

1 bunch tatsoi (Rabbit Fields Farm, Everson)

1 cup oyster mushroom caps (Cascadia Mushrooms, Bellingham)

2 tablespoons butter (Breckinridge Farm, Everson)

1/4 cup onion, chopped (Alm Hill Gardens, Everson)

1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar (BelleWood Acres, Lynden)

1 teaspoon honey (Backyard Bees, Bellingham)

1/4 tsp salt

1 clove garlic, minced (Joe's Gardens, Bellingham)

Optional: pinch of dried habanero powder (friend's garden, Lummi Island)

Directions

Put eggs in a saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring just to a boil, then remove from heat, cover pan, and set aside for 15 minutes. Run under cold water until cool. Eggs should be perfectly hard-boiled. Peel eggs and slice. Set aside.

Clean greens and tear into bite sized pieces.

Dry saute oyster mushrooms (use directions from Cascadia Mushrooms handout). Set aside to cool.

Melt butter in saute pan or skillet over medium heat. Add chopped onions, and cook until onions are soft and ham is browned.

Add vinegar, honey, salt, garlic, and optional habanero pepper powder. Cook for an additional minute.

Immediately put mushrooms on top of greens and pour warm dressing over all. Toss lightly, then top with egg slices.

Serves 2.

Local retail food resources

CSA List: Every year in March the Co-op researches local Whatcom County farms who offer CSAs and compiles a list that includes share prices, products offered, delivery options, and more. They publish the list in their April Newsletter, both on their website and available at the Service desk in both stores. See addresses below.

Appel Farms Cheese Shoppe, 6605 Northwest Road, Ferndale; open Mondays to Saturdays 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.;

Artisan Wine Gallery, 2072 Granger Way, Lummi Island; open for tasting Saturdays 1-5 p.m.;

Bellingham Farmers Market, Railroad at Chestnut, Saturdays 10 a.m.-3 p.m.;

Cloud Mountain Farm Nursery, 6906 Goodwin Road, Everson;

Community Food Cooperative, 1220 N. Forest St. or 315 Westerly Road, Bellingham;

Everybody's Store, 5465 Potter Road, Deming;

Field of Greens, corner of Kale and Everson roads, Everson (opens on May 1)

Red Barn Lavender Farm (eggs), 3106 Thornton Road, Ferndale; Saturday at the Bellingham Farmers Market; or call for availability during the week (360-393-7057);

The Islander, 2106 S. Nugent Road, Lummi Island;

Terra Organica, 1530 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham.

Reach NANCY GING at 360-758-2529 or nancy@whatcomlocavore.com. For complete weekly locavore menus, recipes, and more resources, read her blog at whatcomlocavore.com

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