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Rural farmers markets open, so here's a spring vegetable braise recipe

NANCY GING - FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Besides the Saturday Bellingham Farmers Market and the Wednesday Fairhaven Farmers Market, some of the rural communities also offer local farmers markets. Lynden has a brand new farmers market this year and the Ferndale Public Market is also operating. (See details in the Resources section below.)

Lummi Island (where I live) opened their Farmers Market recently, and I was there to check out who was vending and what was available. The day was sunny and warm so plenty of Islanders were on hand when things opened at 10 a.m.

There was a single produce stand open that day, the Nettles Farm booth. Nettles Farm is a unique family-owned farm operation whose main purpose is to supply fresh farm-to-table ingredients to the restaurant at the Willows Inn, also located here on Lummi Island. The Willows Inn received international acclaim recently when they were selected as one of the top ten restaurants in the world "worth a plane ride" by the New York Times. Other food critics from media such as Gourmet Magazine, Sunset Magazine, and the Boston Globe have picked up the drumbeat, raving about the food offered at the Inn.

Much of the attention is due to the talents of the Willows' young chef, Blaine Wetzel. Only 24 years old, Wetzel was raised in Olympia, where his family still lives. His most recent prior culinary experience was at the famous Noma restaurant in Copenhagen, Denmark, as protege to the legendary chef Rene Redzepi. (Noma is currently enjoying "best restaurant in the world" status according to the prestigious S. Pellegrino awards.) Every dish prepared by Chef Wetzel is a work of art, and people (including other well known chefs) have begun trekking to the Willows Inn to check out the fresh, local cuisine and stay at the bed and breakfast. (For more information, see the website at www.willows-inn.com.)

But I digress. Back at the market, besides the fresh vegetables at the Nettles Farm stand, there were other interesting products and services being offered, such as on-the-spot bicycle repair, a special barbecue spice from South Africa, local art, baked goods, nursery plants, flower essences and a pile of hula hoops near the picnic tables for people to play

with. Market visitors of all ages were happily taking the hoops for a spin, and the fun was contagious.

I was focused on the local market food, of course. My attention was particularly caught by the fresh fava beans Nettles Farm was selling. I love fava beans, but had never worked with them fresh, so was excited to take some home to try.

Fava beans are labor intensive, I discovered. They grow in huge pods and look something like giant lima beans. When I removed the beans from the pods, I was amazed at how heavily the pods are padded. Favas are definitely well protected.

Once the beans have been shelled, each individual bean is still covered by a tough skin that must also be removed. First the beans are blanched for a minute or two in boiling water and then quickly chilled in cold water to stop the cooking. The skin is removed by making a hole at one end (I used my thumbnail) and squeezing the bean out through the opening. At this point, the beans are ready to eat as is, or they can be combined with other ingredients, as I did in the recipe below.

Believe me, the effort is worth it! Fava flavor and texture are unsurpassed.

Producers are listed after each ingredient. The ingredients for this recipe can be varied, depending on what's available.

SPRING VEGETABLE BRAISE

Ingredients

1/2 lb shelled fava beans (Nettles Farm, Lummi Island)

1/2 lb small turnips, stemmed and peeled (Rabbit Fields Farm, Everson)

1/2 lb radishes, stemmed and washed (Terra Verde Garden, Bellingham)

1/4 lb small carrots (Nooksack 9 Farm, Everson)

1 tablespoon butter (Breckinridge Farm, Everson)

3 stalks garlic greens, chopped (Rabbit Fields Farm, Everson)

1/2 to 3/4 cup water

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons fresh herbs (thyme, rosemary, oregano, mint or whatever you prefer), minced (Evergreen Station, Ferndale)

1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar (BelleWood Acres, Lynden)

Directions

Bring a small saucepan of water to boil and add shelled fava beans. Blanch for 1 minute, then remove and plunge in cold water to stop cooking. Remove and discard the outer skin of each bean. Set the beans themselves aside in a small bowl.

Slice the turnips, radishes, and carrots into pieces about the size of a fava bean. (This is so everything will cook evenly.)

Put butter in a large skillet over medium high heat. When butter is melted and hot, add the garlic greens and saute for a minute or two to brown.

Add turnips, radishes, carrots, salt, and 1 tablespoon of the fresh herbs. Mix well and add 1/2 cup water. Once water is boiling, reduce heat to medium. Braise for about 10 minutes, adding water as needed to keep pan from cooking dry.

When vegetables are softened but still have some crunch, add the remaining herbs and apple cider vinegar. Cook another minute or two, then remove from heat.

Serves 4.

LOCAL RETAIL FOOD RESOURCES

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.; also at Fairhaven Village Green, 10th Street and Mill Avenue, Wednesdays Noon to 5 p.m.;

Cloud Mountain Farm Nursery, 6906 Goodwin Road, Everson;

Community Food Co-op, 1220 N. Forest St. or 315 Westerly Road, Bellingham;

Everybody's Store, 5465 Potter Road, Deming;

Ferndale Public Market, Centennial Riverwalk in downtown Ferndale, Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.;

Field of Greens, corner of Kale and Everson roads, Everson; open Wednesdays to Fridays 2-6 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays noon-4 p.m.;

Lummi Island Farmers Market, across from the ferry dock, Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.;

Lynden Farmers Market, grounds of Third Christian Reformed Church in downtown Lynden, Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.;

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.

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Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/06/21/2062696/rural-farmers-markets-open-spring.html#storylink=mirelated#ixzz1QhW1bIsD>