

In early March we participated in a roundtable discussion at Vortex to review February's Community Dinner. While sipping tea and shuffling our papers and thoughts Danah Feldman shared a story about Ron Norman's grandmother, Sadie Coffelt Forest. In the mid 1950's Sadie was hired by the Iceberg Point Reef Net Company to cook for their employees. She prepared meals for the fisherman from a cooking shack on Iceberg Point, and in the springtime on her way to work, Sadie harvested asparagus from a roadside patch she maintained then and Ron gleans from today. Anecdotes like this are the stuff of which Lopez food culture is made. Our local food culture and lore provide us with real knowledge about what has been done before us, and inspiration for what we can do now.

Food culture is a means of preserving and passing down information about food and eating in order to maintain the health and wellbeing of a community within a certain locale. It guides us in deciding what to eat, when to eat it, and how to eat it. By placing food in the context of communal experience food culture encourages us to eat together, share in the enjoyment of what we eat, and moderate our consumption.

The soup tonight is not made primarily from Lopez ingredients but it might have been if our spring hadn't been so wet and chilly, and if we had stores intentionally set aside for this time of year. Relying on more local food sources involves continuous improvisation based on what is available. Spring offers a combination of foods held over winter (apples, onions, and potatoes), foods just beginning to be freshly available (spring greens, nettles, and over wintered cauliflower), and foods like eggs and hardy greens that increase in abundance with longer day length and warmth.

Tonight's meal does feature apples from Danah Feldman, potatoes and shallots from Ken and Kathryn from Horse Drawn Farm, and beef from Nick and Sara Jones from Jones Family Farms. Greens were grown and contributed by Steve and Michele Heller, Christine Langley from Lopez Harvest, and Horse Drawn Farm, with sorrel and mint from Jean, and radishes from Todd Goldsmith and Diane Dear at T&D Farms. Doreen Kana harvested armloads of fresh nettles. Eggs for the dessert came from Shannon Sternberg of Fieldstone Farm and the exotic contribution of Meyer lemons came from Dot Perry in Escondito, CA.

We would like to enthusiastically encourage all kinds of food production for the upcoming growing season. Grow for yourselves, your family, your friends, and future community dinners! Michele Heller has seeds to share and anyone interested in growing food (on a large or small scale) for future evening meals should contact Michele at 468.3618. We are particularly excited about the potential of growing dried beans and grains but will gladly support any culinary endeavors. Please let us know.

Thanks again to the many volunteers-seen and unseen-who make our celebration of community eating possible.

***Please see the back of this page for tonight's recipes. A recipe for lemon bars may be found on the website.**

Curried Onion Apple Cauliflower Soup

Serves 6

4 Tbsp olive oil
1 ½ pounds yellow or sweet onions
1 pound apples, peeling is optional
1 head cauliflower
¼ cup Wes' Afghani Curry Powder or more to taste
Approximately 1 quart water, chicken, or veggie stock
Salt to taste

Cut onions in half. Thinly slice onion halves into half-rounds. Core apples and cut into rough ½ inch dice. Cut cauliflower into small florets using as much of the stem as possible.

Soup

In a large, heavy bottomed soup pot, heat olive oil over medium high heat. Add thinly sliced onions and sauté for 5 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and sweat onions for 5 to 10 minutes stirring occasionally. Stir in curry powder and chopped apples and continue to cook for 5 more minutes. Add chopped cauliflower and enough water or stock to cover vegetables. Add salt to taste and bring soup to simmer. Gently simmer soup until cauliflower pieces are soft but not mushy. Taste for salt and curry powder. At this point, soup may be partially pureed or eaten as is.

Heirloom Scalloped Potatoes

Serves 6

2 to 3 pounds assorted heirloom potatoes, thinly sliced
3 Tbsp butter
1 Tbsp olive oil
4 Tbsp all purpose flour
2 cups whole milk
1 medium onion, thinly sliced
1 tsp salt
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
Nettle Pesto-see following recipe

Cook potatoes in boiling water for 10 minutes. Drain well. While potatoes are cooking make white sauce. Melt butter over medium heat in a 2-quart saucepan. Add olive oil and sauté onions until translucent. Stir in flour and cook for 3 minutes stirring constantly. Whisk in milk and cook until sauce thickens. Add salt and pepper and taste sauce. Preheat oven to 350°. In a baking dish, layer potatoes and sauce alternately. Swirl nettle pesto into top of potatoes. Bake for approximately 45 minutes or until top is golden brown and bubbling.

Nettle Pesto

Makes 1 cup

*Wear gloves when handling raw nettles to avoid slight skin irritation.
3 cups loosely packed young nettle leaves, stems removed leaves washed and dried
½ cup olive oil
3 to 4 cloves garlic
Salt and pepper to taste

Blanch nettles in pot of boiling salted water (should taste like the ocean) for 1 minute. Immediately remove nettles from water and rinse until very cold water to stop the cooking process. Allow nettles to dry off slightly before proceeding with recipe.

Puree all ingredients in bowl of a food processor. Add salt and pepper to taste. Store in airtight container in the refrigerator.

Stir Fried Beef

Serves 4 to 6

1 pound stir fry beef or ¼-inch sliced flank steak (cut across grain) or beef filet
1 to 2 Tbsp oil for stir frying-canola or peanut

Marinade

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
¾ cup soy sauce
¾ cup mirin or dry sherry

Mix marinade ingredients, toss in beef strips, cover, and return to refrigerator for no more than 1 hour. Remove meat from marinade and drain off as much as possible.

In an 8-inch skillet, heat oil over high heat until it glistens. Take care when adding meat-oil may spatter! Stir fry meat for 2 to 3 minutes or until nicely browned on the outside and slightly pink on the inside.
