



# TWO SMALL FARMS

## Community Supported Agriculture

August 4-6, 2010

### Writing Tomato Soup, by Andy Griffin

I give my cell phone number out to the cooks I do business with in San Francisco and I tell them, “Call me any time with questions, complaints, or comments.” Of course I hope they’ve got nothing to complain about but sometimes we really screw things up. The other day, for instance, Phil West at Range on Valencia wanted green tomatoes— hard, unripe, green tomatoes as in “fried green tomatoes” – and Michael Tusk at Quince wanted a pound of tomato greens to jazz up a tomato sauce. Yes, you heard me right, “tomato greens.” And no, tomato leaves are not poisonous. (If you don’t trust me read page 45 in Paul Bertolli’s *Cooking by Hand*.) In my crew’s defense, with my mangled Spanish, “green tomatoes,” or jitomates verdes, does sound sort of like verduras de jitomate, or “tomato greens.” You know where this is going—I asked the crew for eighty pounds of green tomatoes and a pound of tomato greens and I got eighty pounds of tomato greens and a pound of green tomatoes. I wanted to cry for the poor tomato plants, still struggling with the unusual cool summer weather and now hacked back to stumps in the name of haute cuisine.

So when Brent from Spruce Restaurant called one day last fall I took a deep breath. I hoped he was happy.

“What’s up, Brent?”

“I’m having trouble with my lunch menu,” he said. “I need ideas.”

“I’m a farmer,” I replied. “I don’t know anything about cooking.”

“You’re a writer,” Brent said. “I’m trying to write a menu. It’s hard. I’ve got ‘Ladies who lunch’ to deal with. I need something substantial on the plate that ‘reads light.’”

That made me smile; “something substantial that ‘reads light.’” “What do you think about escarole?” I asked. “I have plenty of that in the field.”

Brent considered the idea. “Escarole could work,” he said. “It’s fresh, it’s green. But it’s got body and it goes well with cheese, apples, and nuts. I like it.” Brent was happy. He hung up.

I put the phone back in my pocket but our conversation has stayed on my mind. Obviously cooks cook, but I’d never really thought about how they have to “write” menus too. Is “menu writing” another genre? I asked myself, “like ‘romance,’ ‘mystery,’ or ‘thriller?’ And who’s the best menu writer, anyway?” Then it occurred to me that some of my failures as a home cook might be due to the poor words I’ve

chosen to cook with. After all, Brent isn’t the only one cooking for a tough crowd; he’s got “Ladies who lunch,” but I’ve got a daughter.

I remember when Lena was small. She came into the kitchen while I was cooking dinner and looked suspiciously into the pan. “Does it have ‘ingweediets?’” she asked. Lena is a teenager now so I suppose she’s entitled to a certain amount of irrational existential angst about food. I should probably give her a break. With his comment about “reading light” Brent had clued me into how the description of a dish can play a key role in deciding whether or not it will be well-received. I realize now that my “menu writing skills” haven’t developed past a seventeen year old boy’s maturity level even as my cooking

skills have improved over time. For example, the other day I had the Zuni Café Cookbook open to page 58 when Lena came into the kitchen.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m boiling a rooster,” I said, although, technically, in obedience to my cookbook, I was holding the broth only to a “gentle simmer.”

“Eww,” Lena said with finality.

Brent could teach me a thing or two about crafting my words as carefully as I prepare my stock.

Lena is not one of these people obsessed with knowing “where” their food comes from. Lena lives on a farm. She knows where her food comes from, and she’s not always happy about it. Lena told me one time, “I won’t eat anyone I know, and you can’t make me.” Sometimes I think she’d be a vegetarian if that didn’t mean actually “eating vegetables.”

But I love my daughter and I take pride in my farm so I do try to cook

meals that bring the two together as amicably as possible. It’s tough. Lena does like the red tomato sauce with spaghetti, though, so I thought I’d branch out and make a tomato soup and see if she accepts it.

Cooking is fun for me but I’d get fired if I worked in a restaurant. I’m too slow. Real cooks move so fast you’d think that they’re the ones on the grill! I started my tomato soup project with some leisurely research. Elizabeth David called for tomatoes, ground rice, and egg yolks but I didn’t want to grind rice and I didn’t have any eggs. Barbara Kafka called for heavy cream in one recipe, which I didn’t have, and corn starch in another, which I don’t like, and Ruth Van Waerbeek’s recipe in *Everybody Eats Well* in Belgium called for heavy cream and cognac. I didn’t have any cognac either.

## This Week

**Tomatoes** MF

**Strawberries** HG

**Chantenay Carrots** MF

**Sweet Corn OR Melon** MF

**Lettuce (Romaine, Red Leaf  
or Little Gem)** HG

**Mixed Summer Squash OR  
Desiree Potatoes** HG

**Broccoli OR Romanesco OR  
Cauliflower OR Cabbage** HG

**Parsley Root** MF

**Flowers: Mixed Bouquet** TF

But I did have my special “rooster juice” or, uh, my “Zuni Café chicken stock,” so I decided I’d peel a pile of tomatoes and fake my way through.

To get around the cognac I minced an onion and cooked it in butter with a splash of white wine until the onions were soft and translucent. Then I added the chopped up fresh tomatoes. As the tomatoes were cooking I added the stock, and I threw in a carrot and a parsley root too. I let the whole mess simmer. When the carrot and parsley root were cooked all the way through I whipped up the tomato soup with an immersion blender so that it was silky smooth. I tasted it. It was good with a fresh, bright flavor. Then I let it cool and put it in the fridge; soup often tastes better the second day. Now it’s time to serve dinner and the soup is warming on the stovetop. Will Lena like it? I feel like calling up Brent.

“Ya gotta help me,” I’ll say. “I’ve got a daughter.”

“I don’t know anything about daughters,” he’ll say.

“But you’re a cook, I’ll reply. “And you know ‘Ladies who lunch.’ I’ve already got something good in the pot. I’m having a hard time with my menu writing. Just give me a name for my tomato soup that ‘reads right.’”

## Recipes

(see [www.mariquita.com/recipes](http://www.mariquita.com/recipes) for more recipes)

**Dressing-in-a-Bowl Supper Salad**, adapted from *The Splendid Table's How to Eat Supper: Recipes, Stories, and Opinions* from Lynne Rossetto Kasper and Sally Swift

½ medium red or other mild onion, thin sliced	3–4 TBL good-tasting vinegar
Salt and fresh-ground black pepper	2 TBL dark grainy mustard
2 TBL fresh mild herbs (basil, mint, coriander, parsley); or 1 to 2 tsp. fresh assertive herbs (thyme, rosemary, sage, tarragon)	About 2 cups vegetables (steamed and cooled broccoli or cauliflower, corn, jicama, edamame, tomatoes, shredded carrots etc.), chopped into bite-sized pieces if large
½ cup canned chickpeas, kidney beans, or black beans, rinsed and drained	1 to 2 cups soy foods or cooked meat, seafood, or poultry, chopped into bite-sized pieces
2 heads salad greens	4–6 TBL extra-virgin olive oil or almond, walnut, or hazelnut oil

In a large salad bowl, stir together the onion, 3 tablespoons of the vinegar, some salt and pepper, and the mustard. Add the chickpeas, moistening them with the mixture. Let it stand for about 30 minutes while you set the table.

When you are ready to serve, add the vegetables, herbs, soy foods or meat, and salad greens along with 4 tablespoons of the oil. Toss the salad together. Then taste, and adjust the seasoning as you like with more oil, vinegar, salt, and/or pepper. Serve the salad while it is still crisp.

**Mashed Potatoes and Parsley Root** adapted from *Uncommon Fruits and Vegetables* by Elizabeth Schneider

¾ pound parsley root (weighed with leaves)	1 ¼ pounds potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
Butter to taste	A few TBL hot milk or to taste
S & P (use white pepper if you like)	

Cut off parsley root tops and reserve for use in any recipe calling for parsley. Scrub roots with a brush, then cut into ½ inch slices. Drop parsley root and potatoes into a pot of boiling salted water. Return to a boil and cook until tender – check after about 15 minutes. Drain well. Add butter and hot milk and then mash with an official potato masher. Season to taste with S & P.

**Pepper-Roasted Cauliflower**, By Aida Mollenkamp, from *Chow.com*

16 cups cauliflower, cut into small, even-size florets (from 2 large heads)	¼ cup soy sauce
1 tsp. coarsely ground black pepper	2 TBL vegetable oil
2 tsp. granulated sugar	

Heat the oven to 450°F and arrange a rack in the middle. Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and toss to coat. Allow to marinate for 20 minutes, tossing cauliflower occasionally. Arrange ½ of the cauliflower in a single layer on a baking sheet. Roast until tender and slightly blackened, about 20 minutes. Remove from the oven and repeat with remaining cauliflower. Serve hot or at room temperature.

**Curried Cabbage**, adapted from *The New Internationalist Cookbook* by Troth Wells

1 lg onion, finely chopped	6 TBL Oil
1 lg tomato sliced	2 tsp. cumin, ground
½ tsp. turmeric	2 carrots sliced in rounds
1 md cabbage finely sliced	½ cup water
salt and pepper	

In a large shallow pan with a lid, sauté the onion in the oil over a moderate heat until it is lightly browned. Now add the tomato, salt, spices and continue to cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently. Next put in the carrots and cook for 5 minutes. Then add the cabbage and mix well. Pour in the water, cover the pan and simmer until all the liquid is absorbed and the vegetables are cooked.

**Lentil Soup with Parsley Root and Carrots**

1 lb. dried lentils, washed and drained	¼ cup Lard, bacon drippings, or oil
2 med onions or leeks, chopped	1 parsley root, chopped
1 cup sliced fennel or celery	2 med carrots, sliced
8 cups Water	1 tsp. salt or to taste
Several whole black pepper-corns	2 whole cloves
1 lg Potato, peeled and grated	2 Bay leaves
2 lg Links (or 4 small) smoked -sausage, skin pricked-with fork	2 TBL Good vinegar

In a large pot, heat fat and add carrots, root vegetable and onions. Sauté until onions are golden. Add lentils, water, celery, and seasonings. Grate the potato into the mixture and add sausage. Simmer covered 1 hour until lentils and vegetables are tender. Remove bay leaves. Add vinegar just before serving and adjust salt. Serve with a crusty bread and salad. Serves 6

*From Mariquita Farm: tomatoes, corn, melon, carrots, parsley root. From High Ground Organics: strawberries, lettuce, summer squash, potatoes, cabbage, romanesco, cauliflower, broccoli. From Thomas Farm: flowers.*