



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

March 31, April 1, and 2 2010

Maror and Chazeret, by Andy Griffin

During a Passover Seder feast a blessing is recited over two kinds of bitter herbs, Maror and Chazeret. In America, the bitter herb often used for the Maror is horseradish while Romaine lettuce stands in for Chazeret. Since a Seder is the ritual retelling of the liberation of the Israelites and of their exodus from Egypt, and since the bitter herbs are meant to evoke the bitterness of slavery that the Jews endured under the Pharaohs, you might think that using lettuce would be cheating. Sure, horseradish is harsh, but can a mouthful of lettuce evoke anything more than mild discontent? As a lazy Lutheran and a dirt farmer I'm not qualified to speak to the spiritual implications of different vegetables in Jewish practice, but as a student of vegetable lore I can say that both horseradish and lettuce are deeply rooted in Egypt's history, agriculture and cuisine.

Opinions differ on how and when the tribes of Israel fled Egypt but horseradish is known to have been cultivated in Egypt from at least 1500 BC onwards. Horseradish evolved in western Asia and was doubtless gathered in the wild for eons before it was confined behind the garden gate.

The bitter, stinging flavor of raw, grated horseradish root comes from the mustard oil that is released when the plant's tissues are damaged. Horseradish is a member of the Brassicaceae family, along with mustards and turnip greens. Cooked greens may be less biting than that of their horseradish cousins but what bitterness they do have is due to the presence of mustard oil as well. Like horseradish, mustards and turnips have been cultivated around the Mediterranean basin since agriculture began and I'd imagine they'd make for acceptable Maror too if horseradish was unavailable.

Lettuce, or *Lactuca sativa*, also has origins in the Middle East. I've read that there are wall carvings in the temple of Pharaoh Senusret I who ruled over Egypt circa 1971 BC to 1926 BC. If lettuces don't taste very bitter to you, that's not to say that they didn't have a stronger flavor in the old days. Wild lettuces are still found growing around the world as garden weeds and they're still very bitter and are only palatable when picked quite young. The ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Passover is held on the evening of the 14th day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar, which corresponds to late March or early April in the Gregorian calendar. It's worth noting that in the Sinai, where the tribes of Israel fled after their Exodus from Egypt, wild lettuces are young and

tender at this time of year, still fresh and leafy from the spring rains. Plant breeders have selected for lettuces that don't taste bitter, but even modern lettuces will turn bitter when they don't get enough water, or when they suffer stress from heat. Persistent summertime heat in Hollister is one reason that the Two Small Farms CSA lettuce harvest moves from Mariquita Farm to High Ground Organic Farm in Watsonville by April or May.

I trust that the lettuces we've harvested for your harvest share this week are too mild to serve as convincing bitter greens but we have also harvested rapini greens. Rapini, or *Brassica rapa*, is a form of turnip greens. Yes, rapini is "bitter", but only in a mild mustardy and savory way. And speaking of "savory," did you know that the word comes to us from the Latin *sapere*, meaning "to taste or to know," as does the Spanish cognate verb *saber*. English speaking cowboys in Texas borrowed *saber* from Mexican *vaqueros* and rebranded it as "savvy" to mean "well informed" or "perceptive."

So what does savory mean?

Something that is savory can't be purely sweet, or bitter, or salty, or sour, but somehow appeals to a fifth sense or experience where the other four flavors find a rich and satisfying balance. By the time we humans have some years on us

hopefully we will have matured into savvy *Homo sapiens*, truly wise and men and women, capable of finding balance in an unsettling world.

As I research the Seder meal on Wikipedia and think about bitter herbs, I imagine that the Seder cook is trying to achieve a celebratory meal that teaches wisdom and tradition to the children even as it reminds the adults of the richness of their heritage, not just through words, but through flavors. Besides bitter herbs, the Seder table is always set with *Karpas*, which is some mild vegetable, like carrot or potato, which can be dipped in salt water or vinegar to recall the tears of slavery, and there is *Charoset*, which is a sweet paste of fruits and nuts meant to symbolize the mortar used by the Israelites to set the bricks of the buildings they built in Egypt—the sweet, the salty, the bitter, and the sour. Then the family gathers, the wine is brought to table, the chairs are pulled out, the first blessings are said, and everyone sits down together to savor life and tradition and each other's company.

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This Week

Cauliflower ^{HG}

Butternut Squash ^{MF}

Fennel ^{MF, HG}

Leeks ^{MF}

Strawberries ^{HG} **OR New**

Potatoes ^{MF}

Rapini Greens ^{MF}

Lettuces ^{MF}

Baby Nantes Carrots ^{MF}

**Flowers: Tulips, Iris, and
Ranunculus** ^{TF}

From Mariquita Farm: Potatoes, Carrots, Butternut squash, some Fennel, Leeks, Rapini, Lettuce. From High Ground: Cauliflower, Strawberries, some Fennel. From Thomas Farm: flowers.

Recipes and Notes

(see www.mariquita.com/recipes for more recipes)

Veggie notes on storing and cooking: Put everything in the fridge as soon as you return home, except for the strawberries if you get them, and the butternut squash—both of these items can be left on a cool spot on your counter. The new potatoes are truly new and fresh—they will rot if you leave them for too long in your fridge. Try to eat them within 3-5 days.

Julia's Quickest Ideas for this week's box:

1) Cauliflower: Steam and cool: then dress with a vinaigrette and other chopped things such as hard cheese, toasted nuts, onions, fresh or dried herbs: and you have a salad to munch on or serve at a meal: but it's made ahead

2) Fennel: slice thinly and add to a green lettuce salad or make its own salad: I like to make a lemon vinaigrette (or use a favorite bottled dressing of any sort) and dress the sliced fennel. Let marinate: and voila: another made ahead veggie dish to serve or snack on.

OR, try chopping it up like celery and cooking it with onions when you're starting a soup (nearly any kind), spaghetti sauce, chili...

3) Strawberries, if you get them: eat them.

3) New Potatoes, if you get them: steam and eat with butter or plain with a bit of S & P. that's all they need!

4) Leeks: Use like onions! Anywhere you'd chop up and cook up an onion, use a leek.

5) Rapini Greens: Steam or sauté and eat as a side dish dressed with a few chile flakes or make a one dish meal with 1 bunch chopped rapini, crumbled and browned sausage, and/or toasted pine nuts, and grated parmesan at the end. This dish is so classic; you can google a recipe for this before you can blink! Ok: now you'll laugh: I just googled 'rapini pasta recipe' and I got 23,000+ hits, and my own rapini recipe website came up first.

6) Lettuces: make a salad!

7) Baby Loose Nantes Carrots: clean and eat.

8) Butternut Squash: poke a few fork holes, then bake in medium oven (350, 400 etc.) until a fork can easily pierce the neck part (like of like what a baked potato should feel like when finished baking). Eat plain or with butter, s & p.

Fish, Roast Vegetables and Cilantro Dressing,

from chef Jonathan Miller

1 tsp. cumin seeds	1 tsp. coriander seeds
½ tsp. caraway seeds	seeds from 2 cardamom pods
½ tsp. black peppercorns	6 TBS butter, melted (unsalted)
2 garlic cloves, minced	1" piece of ginger, peeled and grated
8 small to medium potatoes, halved or quartered	½ head large cauliflower, cut into florets
1 fennel bulb, thinly sliced	½ butternut squash, peeled and diced
4 filets white fish of choice	

Heat your oven to 400. Toast the spices in a dry skillet until fragrant, about a minute or 2. Allow to cool before grinding them in a spice grinder. (You can use pre-ground spices for this in approximately the same proportions, but the flavors

will be a bit less lively.) Combine the spices with the butter, garlic, and ginger. Toss each vegetable with some of the butter mix and some salt, but keep them separate, as you will roast them in the oven and each one takes a different amount of time. Roast the veggies until they are done, about 30 minutes for the potatoes, 20-25 for the cauliflower, 15-20 minutes for the fennel, 15 minutes for the squash.

Sear the fish: season both sides with salt and pepper. Sear in a hot skillet with oil, skin side first. Flip and finish in the oven for 5 minutes. Allow to rest after roasting for about 5 minutes. Serve with the roasted, spiced veggies and the following cilantro sauce.

Cilantro Sauce

1 cup cilantro leaves	½ cup mint leaves
½ onion, minced	¼ cup grapeseed oil (or any vegetable oil)
2 TBS rice vinegar	

Blend everything in a blender, then add some salt and pepper, blend again and taste. Correct seasonings if necessary.

Rapini with Cornbread Croutons, from chef

Jonathan Miller

1 bunch rapini	2-4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
olive oil	zest from 1 lemon
crushed red chili flakes	cornbread croutons

Blanch the rapini in salted, boiling water for about 30 seconds. Drain and quickly rinse them under cold water to stop the cooking. Heat a grill pan or large skillet until very hot. Add a generous amount of olive oil and then toss in the rapini and the garlic. Sauté until cooked to your liking. If you really want to give them a good charring, leave them in one spot on the grill/skillet until they get a good crust on one side, then flip or stir them. Toss in the lemon zest and a pinch of chili flakes. Serve with the croutons and another generous drizzle of olive oil. (And do yourself a favor and fry your cornbread croutons in some butter and salt.)

Roast Veggies, from chef Jonathan Miller

I love roasting vegetables. I find the flavor and texture comforting, and I also love how easy they are to do. Two favorites are in your box this week: baby carrots and leeks. These are perfect together because they will take about the same amount of time to roast. Heat your oven to 400, trim your carrots, and slice the leeks lengthwise (in half if they are young leeks, into 1/2 inch wide strips if older). Toss both in some olive oil, salt and pepper and roast them until they are nice and tender, about 25-30 minutes. You can also do this with leeks and butternut squash, which is practically a classic now.

Fennel and Cheese for Dessert, adapted from *The Victory Garden Cookbook* by M. Morash

Fennel bulbs	salt and pepper
cruet of good-quality olive oil	One excellent cheese, such as gorgonzola or a creamy goat cheese

Wash and trim fennel bulbs. If small, cut in half; quarter larger ones. Serve with wedges of cheese and pass the oil, salt, and pepper.