

La Vida Local

WE HEART WINTER VEGGIES (AND OUR FREEZER FINDS)

BY SUZI STEFFEN

Tryin' to live the locavore life? Kind of tough in January and February ... or so it seems.

Possibly you pickled, canned or froze green beans, tomatoes, peas, berries, cherries, peaches and cucumbers. Maybe you wore your food dryer out with racks of plums, zucchini, summer squash and pears. Perhaps, like me, you bought a couple of pounds of locally grown black beans at the Holiday Farmers' Market, not to mention many pounds of red onions. So don't get me wrong — the thrill of digging out the frost-encrusted bag of basil-and-olive-oil ice cubes hasn't worn off, nor has the feeling of accomplishment when we lever the lid off a jar of pretty pickled beets. But, er, wouldn't it be nice to have *fresh salad greens* with those beets?

Even local farmers, with their own stores of food — plus the occasional hardy kale plant or cabbage surviving the frost — speak with longing about the months ahead. "The daffodils are budding up, spring is close and there will start being more fresh food," says Mary Jo Wade of Winter Green Farm. Sophie Bello of Groundwork Organics says, "These are the darkest hours, but we're down to two months [until the farmers' markets open]!"

But if you have that locavore passion, it's still possible to use seasonal vegetables (and, if you like, local meat or fish) to survive until April 5, when the Saturday Market opens, in a good frame of mind and with tasty meals to boot. What to cook as you sip your water, Bethel Heights pinot or Willamette Brewery Espresso Stout? Local restaurants and farmers have ideas for you even as you dream of the opening weekend of the Saturday Market. Your best bet to find local veggies is to shop at Capella or Sundance (The Kiva also has a few local options).

For one thing, this time is mostly about root vegetables. From Winter Green Farm to Iralia restaurant, from Ruby and Amber's Organic Oasis to Groundwork Organics, everyone's talking roots. Root vegetables — beets, turnips, salsify, carrots, potatoes, sweet potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes, parsnips and more — provide excellent fiber, a fair amount of carbohydrates, potassium, folate, vitamin C and more. Let me start with what I consider the most misunderstood root: the rutabaga.

Rutabaga. Ugly, yellowish, purplish, turnip ... ish. Er, a rutabaga kind of is a turnip, unless you want to call it a cabbage (it's a cross); some people call it a swede or yellow turnip. Unless you're at a local natural food store, the checkers at the grocery likely will give you that lost puppy look when the rutabaga hits the scanner. But oh, its tangy goodness!



Mollie Katzen's
Root Vegetable
Soup

Here's the way I like rutabagas best: Scrub and/or peel a bunch of root veggies; cut them up with the soft ones like turnips and sweet potatoes bigger than rutabagas and potatoes; slice up a bunch of onions and depaper but do not peel a few cloves of garlic; toss with olive oil, kosher salt, freshly ground pepper and perhaps sage or rosemary; pop in the oven for 20 minutes at 450 and 30 more minutes at around 325 (shaking the pan or turning the veggies about every 10 minutes), and voila! The rutabagas' mustardy bite balances out the sweet carrots and yams, the fluffy potatoes and the mild parsnips. Squeeze out the roasted garlic onto the pipin' hot vegetables for more goodness. But you can also do traditional mixes like baked apple and rutabaga mash, potato and rutabaga mash, turnip and rutabaga mash ... you get the idea. And rumor from the meat-eating side of the world has it that lamb (local lamb, perhaps from Deck Family Farm at www.deckfamilyfarm.com) goes well with these root veggies for shepherd's pie, kebabs and other tasty treats.

If you prefer soup (January, I heard on "Splendid Table," is National Soup Month), you might want to make the recipe for Root Vegetable Soup in Mollie Katzen's *Vegetable Heaven*. This ginger and cinnamon spicy treat never fails to win converts to the root fold, and its sunny color warms up a winter table. Toss in whatever root vegetables you want, even adding some squash or pumpkin from the pantry, and, well, yum.

Alongside that steaming plate or bowl of healthy roots, best stir up a mess of kale, spinach or baby chard. At least, that's what Bello says is still growing (a bit) despite the winter weather. Winter makes spinach, kale and other bitter-ish leafy greens much sweeter, and with kale, sweeter means tastier. You might already know that kale can serve as more than a garnish, but it's a versatile green that can pop into stir-fry dishes, bond with locally produced bacon from Sweet Briar Farms, turn a barley dish into a vitamin-packed and wonderfully textured dinner or simply get tossed into a sizzling hot pan with garlic, onion, broth and/or soy sauce for a few minutes until it wilts. Baby chard, much sweeter than kale to begin with, can serve as a partner for pasta, a base for salads or even a dessert, with candied ginger and lemon zest helping show its potential. Mmmm. Just think of the antioxidants you'd be packing in with those recipes. Not that the *EW* worries about the nutritional benefits of winter greens, you understand. We're about taste, and we like how, say, hot mustard shallot dressing wilts spinach perfectly to serve as support for seared scallops.

If you want to take on a slightly more challenging and future-oriented task, imitate Kris Woolhouse of Ruby and Amber's Organic Oasis: Pick up some local carrots, a bunch of local cabbage, some local garlic (plentiful and tasty, for sure), hot peppers, ginger and scallions, and make yourself some tangy, spicy kimchi.

Woolhouse got her recipe from Sandor Katz' *Wild Fermentation* — an inspiring read for a gray February day, perhaps — but the Internet can suggest many another technique for making this traditionally Korean food.

Speaking of those fresh salad greens, Groundwork Organics supplies Sam Bond's Garage with the last of its greenhouse-tended salad mix, and, to quote Woolhouse, "Spring's just around the corner!" ■



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