

In the mood for a pickle

In terms of healthy eating, snacking is my downfall. So long as I abstain, I'm fine. But once I start, I can't stop.

But we all know that abstinence isn't realistic, at least not in the long run. Conventional wisdom has always been that rather than deprive yourself of snacks, you should make healthier choices about them. Not a horrible idea... And you often hear the suggestion to keep a bowl of cut and ready-to-eat vegetables — such as carrot sticks and celery — in the refrigerator to satisfy those urges.

As if. When I'm feeling like polishing off a loaf of bread and half a pound of cheese, a bunch of carrot sticks aren't going to do it for me.

It took many years for me to realize there are ways to make this otherwise silly advice work. I've discovered there are things I can do to carrot sticks (aside from dunk them in sour cream) and other veggies to render them way more satisfying, yet still healthy. And I found that while these doctored veggies in no way can be confused with a bag of potato chips, they can be satisfying enough to prevent me from inhaling the refrigerator.

One of my favorite ways is to turn the vegetables into a quick pickle. Turns out that bathing them in a salty-tangy-sweet brine can radically up their appeal. The best part is that these veggies are fast and simple to prepare, and it's easy to double or triple the recipe to make sure you have ample healthy munchies on hand.

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Quick-pickled carrots and radishes

AP Photo/Matthew Mead

QUICK-PICKLED CARROTS and RADISHES

Don't fret too much over how you cut your carrots. The trick really is just to get all of the pieces roughly the same size. Usually if I'm dealing with medium to large carrots, I cut off the bottom half and leave it as is, or cut it in half lengthwise. Then I cut the upper half into quarters lengthwise. But feel free to cut shorter lengths as you see fit.

Start to finish: 20 minutes, plus cooling
Servings: 8
3 cups cider vinegar
1 cup sugar
1/4 cup kosher salt
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon caraway seeds
1 teaspoon yellow mustard seeds
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
2 pounds carrots, peeled, trimmed and cut into spears
1 pound red radishes, trimmed and quartered

In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, combine the vinegar, sugar, salt, cumin, caraway, mustard seeds, garlic powder and onion powder. Bring to a simmer, stirring often, until the salt and sugar are dissolved. Add the carrots and radishes, then bring to a boil. Cook for 5 minutes, then set aside off the heat until cool.

Once the vegetables are cool, use a slotted spoon to transfer them to a jar or bowl. Ladle just enough of the liquid over the vegetables to cover them. Cover and refrigerate for up to 7 days.
Nutrition information per serving: 70 calories; 5 calories from fat (7 percent of total calories); 0 g fat (0 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 15 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 2 g protein; 580 mg sodium.

A healthy lentil salad tastes anything but

Start to finish: 25 minutes
Servings: 4
1 cup dried small green lentils (French lentils or lentilles de Puy)
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 small carrot, finely chopped
2 medium shallots, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh curly parsley

Place the lentils in a mesh strainer and rinse with cool water. Discard any gravel or other debris.
 Place the lentils in a 4-quart saucepan, then add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Set over medium-high heat and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low, then simmer until the lentils are just tender but not falling apart, about 15 minutes. When lentils are done, drain them, then return them to the saucepan and cover. Set aside. In a small bowl, whisk together the mustard, vinegar and a pinch each of salt and pepper. While continuing to



whisk, drizzle in the oil and whisk until fully combined and emulsified. Drain any lingering liquid from the lentils, then place them in a medium bowl. Add the vinaigrette, carrot, shallots and parsley. Toss gently, taking care not to smash the lentils. Taste and adjust the vinegar and salt, if necessary. The dressing should have a hint of mustard and enough acidity to offset the richness of the lentils.
 Serve the salad warm, room temperature or chilled. Keeps in the refrigerator for

up to 3 days.
Nutrition information per serving: 320 calories; 170 calories from fat (53 percent of total calories); 19 g fat (2.5 g saturated; 0 mg trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 30 g carbohydrate; 8 g fiber; 2 g sugar; 10 g protein; 230 mg sodium.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pitmaster at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and author of three books, including "Taming the Flame."



The sun goes down behind a waterfront trail at Jack London Square in Oakland, Calif. on December 21. Jack London was born in San Francisco but spent his boyhood on the Oakland waterfront and you'll find him immortalized there by way of a bronze statue at Jack London Square, a retail and restaurant complex. There is also a replica of his log cabin next to Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon where London studied as a schoolboy and later made notes for his books.

AP Photo/Eric Risberg

The Berkeley way

By MICHELLE LOCKE
 Associated Press

BERKELEY, Calif. — This famously liberal college town is known as the cradle of the Free Speech Movement, but speech isn't the only thing that's free here.

Whether you're strolling the redwood-shaded University of California, Berkeley, campus, or slipping across the Oakland border for a dose of Golden State history, you can exercise your limbs and your intellect without giving your wallet a workout.

Here are five suggestions to get you started on your gratis gallivanting.

HIKE

Set in the hills above Berkeley, Tilden Park is the jewel of Berkeley's many green spaces. You can take one of the many hiking trails - Nimitz Way is popular with bikers, hikers and equestrians — or picnic in one of the meadows. If you have young ones in tow, a stop by the Little Farm is mandatory; take along some celery or lettuce to feed the placid animals.

If you do decide to spend a little cash, there are modest fees to enter the Lake Anza swimming beach, ride the vintage carousel or ride a miniature steam train, <http://www.ebparks.org/parks/tilden>. If you're looking for a straightforward walk, another option is Claremont Canyon, which offers a short climb to the ridge top with sweeping views of campus and San Francisco Bay. This is especially lovely at sunset, although be aware the last part of the trail is both steep and slippery. <http://www.ebparks.org/parks/claremont>—canyon.

SMELL THE ROSES, AND THE PUYA RAIMONDI

Oakland and Berkeley both have rose gardens tucked into residential areas. The Berkeley garden is a Works Progress Administration project and has a terraced amphitheater and redwood pergola. The Oakland garden, officially the Morcom Rose Garden, is a relaxing oasis not far from bustling Grand Avenue with its eclectic mix of restaurants, coffee bars and stores. For major flower power there's the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden, which has more than 13,000 plants from around the world, including the puya raimondi plant, known as the "Queen of the Andes," that's



A man dances by himself on Sproul Plaza on the University of California campus in Berkeley, Calif.

AP Photo/Eric Risberg



A record store advertises their vinyl selections on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, Calif. You haven't really visited Berkeley unless you've strolled Telegraph Ave., a collection of bookstores, cafes and other stores lined by vendors selling various arts and crafts.

AP Photo/Eric Risberg

FIVE FREE THINGS

in the South American section. There's a \$10 fee to visit most days, but the garden is free on the first Wednesday of each month.

STEP INTO HISTORY

Jack London was born in San Francisco but spent his boyhood on the Oakland waterfront and you'll find him immortalized there by way of a bronze statue at Jack London Square, a retail and restaurant complex. There's also a replica of his log cabin next to Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon where London studied as a schoolboy and later made notes for his books. Not far away you'll find the Oakland Museum of California which features exhibits on art, history and the natural sciences and charges no admission on the first Sunday of the month.

SEE THE STREET SCENE

You haven't really visited Berkeley unless you've strolled Telegraph Avenue, a collection of bookstores, cafes and other stores lined by vendors selling various arts and crafts. Stop in at Amoeba Music to see the huge record collection and take in the mural at the corner of Haste Street and Telegraph commemorating the creation of People's Park, a UC-owned block of land taken over by student and community activists in 1969.

GET SCHOOLED

Set close to downtown, the UC Berkeley campus is easily accessible. Here you can stroll along redwood-lined creeks or stretch out on the grass and watch the world go by.

Check out the landmark bell tower (Campanile). It costs \$3 to take the elevator and stairs to the top, but you can enjoy the sound of the tower's 61 bells anywhere on campus. Music plays at various times with longer concerts on Sundays at 2 p.m. Don't miss Sproul Plaza, which is near the Telegraph Avenue entrance to campus. A granite circle set into the paving stones commemorates the 1964 Free Speech Movement. The protest is also memorialized at the Free Speech Movement Café at the entrance to the Moffitt Library. Here you will find four wall-mounted cases with rotating exhibits as well as occasional forums, panels and other exhibits. If you do have cash in your pocket, this would be a good place to get a cup of organic, fair trade coffee.

Atlantic City eager for 2015 after its worst year

By WAYNE PARRY
 Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — Few people are more eager to see the clock strike midnight on Dec. 31 than Atlantic City casino executives and the thousands of workers who still have jobs there.

Four of the resort's 12 casinos shut down during 2014 (and a fifth narrowly escaped with a last-minute financing deal just before Christmas), 8,000 workers lost their jobs and casino revenue continued its eight-year plunge.

Several major developments are expected in 2015 that will help shape Atlantic City's future, including the outcome of state efforts to help the struggling resort town, a decision on whether PokerStars can join New Jersey's Internet gambling market, the fate of the former Revel casino and a ramped-up push for a statewide referendum on whether casinos should be allowed in other parts of the state.

"It's got to be better than the year we just had given that we had four closings. In that regard, the worst is behind us," said Tony Rodio, president of the Tropicana Casino and Resort. "But there's certainly a lot of uncertainty with the tax situation and the state legislation, and about market conditions. I'd forecast a better year, but still cloudy."

Kevin Ortzman, president of the Casino Association of New Jersey, said Atlantic City took some bitter but necessary medicine this year.

"Atlantic City experienced big changes in 2014, changes that were very difficult but nonetheless necessary for the greater good of the entire region," he said.

The biggest question heading into 2015: Is the bleeding over? Casino executives and analysts say the remaining eight casinos have a better chance of success now that the market has contracted; "right-sizing" was a frequently used term in 2014 as The Atlantic Club, Showboat, Revel and Trump Plaza closed. In November, the eight remaining casinos saw their revenue increase by 11.5 percent compared with November 2013.

But it's too soon to sound the all-clear signal. Gary Loveman, president of Caesars Entertainment, seemed to put Bally's on notice in October, saying, "We need to make money there."

Wall Street firm Fitch Ratings predicts Atlantic City's casino revenue will dip to \$2.6 billion this year (from \$2.86 billion in 2013) and decline further to \$2.5 billion in 2015.

Sometime in 2015, the state Division of Gaming Enforcement is expected to decide whether to let PokerStars, the world's largest poker website, into New Jersey's online gambling market. The process has been complicated by the company's past legal troubles, but a new owner, Amaya Gaming, and personnel changes are aimed at getting a New Jersey license.

PokerStars, with its huge player following, could breathe new life into the state's Internet gambling market, which took in only about a tenth of the \$1 billion many had forecast for its first year of operation. It also would give a boost to Resorts Casino Hotel, which has done without an Internet component for a year while waiting for PokerStars to be approved.

The fate of the former Revel casino hotel remains unclear as well. A Canadian company reached a deal to buy it from bankruptcy court for \$110 million but pulled out over a dispute with bondholders over debt from the construction of the casino's costly power plant. A court hearing on a possible sale to the runner-up, Florida developer Glenn Straub, is set for Jan. 5.

State officials are considering numerous tax and financial aid packages for Atlantic City's casino and municipal finances, but none has been enacted yet. More are expected to emerge next month from the third summit on the city's future convened by Gov. Chris Christie.

And lawmakers in northern New Jersey are intensifying a push to get a question before voters on the November ballot on whether casinos should be permitted in other parts of the state. The Meadowlands racetrack and Jersey City are two proposed sites.

Atlantic City's casinos and southern New Jersey legislators vehemently oppose that prospect, even with large subsidies from a northern casino's revenue flowing to Atlantic City as a subsidy for the loss of its in-state monopoly.



This July 23 photo shows the Showboat Casino Hotel, left, and Revel Casino Hotel, right, a few weeks before both shut down.

AP photos



In this Oct. 6 photo, a worker applies caulk to holes in the facade of the former Trump Plaza casino in Atlantic City N.J. after letters spelling out the casino's name were removed. The casino closed on Sept. 16.

EAT SHOP PLAY

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GO FOR THE FOOD: ABU DHABI

Gulf Arab tradition on a platter

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — The main road connecting Abu Dhabi with Dubai is a long stretch of highway that runs through the desert — a stark reminder of how this country on the eastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula once looked just 40 years ago before an oil boom.

In both metropolises, foreigners far outnumber the locals. The two emirates are home to countless Western food chains and ultrachic, reservations-only celebrity-chef restaurants imported from London, New York and Los Angeles. They both boast ultramodern skylines with architecturally stunning skyscrapers, opulent hotels and huge shopping malls, a testament

to the Gulf's penchant for swagger, luxury and Western imports.

However, the road linking Abu Dhabi to Dubai is surprisingly unadorned, functional and subdued.

It seemed only natural that the austere chain of Emirates Guest Cook Restaurants found a home along this highway.

Emirati dishes of lamb, chicken and fish are served on heaping beds of spiced rice in a down-to-earth environment at bargain prices. It's where Emiratis and Gulf Arab visitors come for the region's most important meal of the day — lunch. The place is busiest between

noon and 3 p.m.

The simple formula here is heavy portions that are light on the wallet. Dishes range from around 20 dirhams (\$5.50) for single portions to 40 dirhams (\$10.50) for full-sized meals for two or more people. All meals at the Emirates Guest Cook Restaurants include a side of tomato and onion salsa and a few cucumber, carrot and lemon wedges.

The platters are served two ways: either on dining tables downstairs or in traditional Arabian-style upstairs. Upstairs is where guests sit on a carpeted floor in private nooks lined with pillows. Waiters bring each party a large platter

to share and eat by hand.

I went for the chicken majboos, also known as kabasa across the Gulf. Unlike some Indian cuisines, Emirati dishes are not particularly spicy. The majboos was steamed and boiled with black pepper, cumin, coriander seeds, ginger, bay leaves, cinnamon and cloves. The rice was topped with copious amounts of tangy dried red currants.

For my husband, I ordered a take-out portion of the chicken madfoon, cooked underground in a clay oven. The rice was infused with pieces of fried onion. My colleague, who hails from Iran, had the fish, which is cooked in a similar way across both sides of the Persian Gulf.

Other popular Emirati dishes on the menu include mandi, an originally Yemeni meat and rice dish slow-cooked in a tandoor clay oven,

and biryani, a uniquely South Asian import.

And just to be clear, here is what you won't find on the menu: kitsch dishes like camel burgers and Lebanese mezze like hummus and baba ghanoush. That's because neither is true in form to the local cuisine.

The menu at Emirates Guest Cook Restaurants is an authentic fusion of South Asian and Iranian spices, flavors that for centuries have landed on the shores of this ancient trade route linking India with the British Empire.

Just take the owner Nasser Ibrahim Hussein, who goes by the name Abu Mansoor. An entrepreneurial 40-year-old man with a wide smile, two young children and a third on the way, Abu Mansoor is originally from Shiraz in southwest Iran. He moved to the Emirates in the early 1990s, married an Emirati woman and acquired Emirati citizenship. He opened three

restaurants next to one another in the same roadside strip of sleepy storefront shops. One offers Iranian food, the second Emirati food and the third grilled meats.

So how hard was it to find a locally-owned restaurant that serves only local food? Well, very hard.

Most website searches for Emirati restaurants direct you to malls or hotels that offer a loose mix of Mediterranean cuisine and a few local dishes. Emirates Guest Cook Restaurants has no website or Facebook group, and the few references to it online list the wrong number. I heard about it through word of mouth from a colleague whose Emirati mother orders from there.

Not without irony, it's easy to spot across the highway from a giant European hypermarket and mall named Deerfields Townsquare.