



BY BETTY KAISER
For the Sentinel

Cook's Corner

Summer gardens heading into the sunset

Canning season for home-grown tomatoes is right about NOW at our house. Normally, I would be a happy girl. But after weeks of praying for rain—it rained! On partially ripe tomatoes! Sadly, the wet weather and dramatic drop in temperature caused many of our tomatoes to split before we got them picked. I think this is what one calls “a mixed blessing.” Happy for the rain. Sad for the produce.

This year we had a bumper crop of tomatoes and were fortunate to be able to salvage most of them. Some were ripe. Some had to be put green in brown paper bags to ripen. That means I am creatively canning tomatoes in small batches over many days. That's not my style. I like to spend a couple of days on them and be done.

The rest of the fruits and veggies are in various states. Our Spitzenberg apples are tiny this year — just about big enough for 3-4 bites and too small for applesauce. The thornless blackberries were unbelievably prolific. We have eaten and frozen our fill—now the birds are enjoying them. Newly planted lettuce and sugar snap peas are thriving, but the cucumbers have dwindled down to a precious few.

Our zucchini, however, just keep on coming. In fact, at this point in time, I really have to get creative to make them palatable. One night out of desperation I sliced and sautéed them with onions for a side dish. Delicious! Even our resident “I'll grow them but I won't eat them” gardener licked the platter clean (with some applesauce on the side).

So today's recipes are a conglomeration of what to do with veggies at the end of the season. Quite by accident I stumbled across several variations of “Parmesan-Crusted Zucchini Fries.”

They are delicious! They are also oven-fried and versatile. You can add different seasonings or leave out the cheese. A real treat. Give them a try.

My base recipe for homemade pasta sauce is so simple that I don't have a written recipe for it! It calls for equal amounts of chopped onions and bell peppers sautéed with a little oil until soft; add double the amount of diced tomatoes, some garlic, a little salt and basil, some brown sugar and red wine vinegar; bring to a boil. I can it in pint jars. To serve, I put it in a saucepan, “doctor” it up with a can of tomato sauce, adjust the seasonings and pour it over ravioli, spaghetti, or whatever. It's quick and easy.

Making homemade tomato sauce has always sounded like too much work for me. Anything that involves transferring hot liquids into a blender is intimidating. But I'm going to try the recipe below for Slow-Cooker Tomato Sauce. Cooking the tomatoes with the addition of carrots, onion and celery will really brighten up the sauce. Enjoy!

PARMESAN-CRUSTED ZUCCHINI FRIES

1/3 cup (about 1 1/2 ounces) finely shredded fresh Parmesan cheese

1/3 cup Panko (Japanese bread-crumbs)

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon dried basil

1/8 teaspoon ground red pepper

1 large egg, beaten

3 small zucchini (1 1/4 pounds)

Cooking spray

1/2 cup tomato-basil pasta sauce

Preheat oven to 450°.

Combine first 5 ingredients in a small shallow bowl. Place egg in

a separate shallow bowl.

Trim ends from zucchini; cut each zucchini in half crosswise. Quarter each zucchini half lengthwise to make 24 zucchini sticks. Dip zucchini in egg; dredge in Panko mixture; pressing to coat. Place zucchini on a baking sheet coated with cooking spray. Coat tops of zucchini with cooking spray.

Bake at 450° for 20 minutes or until golden brown. Serve immediately with pasta sauce. Serves 4; 6 zucchini fries and 2 tablespoons sauce.

SLOW-COOKER TOMATO SAUCE

(Adapted from an “Oregonian” recipe)

6 1/4 pounds tomatoes, peeled and chopped
2 carrots, peeled and coarsely chopped (about 1 cup)
2 stalks celery, coarsely chopped (about 1 cup)

1 onion, coarsely chopped (about 1 medium)

1/2 cup coarsely chopped fresh parsley

1 teaspoon each basil and oregano

1 tablespoon salt (I use garlic salt)

1/4 cup torn fresh basil leaves

Skin the tomatoes by briefly dunking in a pot of boiling water and removing the skins. Chop.

Place tomatoes, carrots, celery, onion, parsley and salt in a 6-quart slow-cooker. Toss to combine. Cover and cook on high for 2 hours. Stir, set the lid ajar, and cook on high until vegetables are very

soft, juices look concentrated and any water has cooked away.

*Pass the mixture through a food mill. If you don't have a food mill, puree the sauce (in batches if necessary) in a food processor or blender. Add the basil, then pass the sauce through the food mill again using the disk with the smallest holes (to get rid of the seeds). Pass it through a fine-meshed sieve to remove seeds if necessary. Taste and add more salt, if necessary.

*Note: If you like chunky sauces and aren't bothered by seeds, don't worry about extra passes through the food processor. If necessary just use a potato masher to combine ingredients to your preferred consistency.

Serving Variations:

Dilute the sauce with a vegetable broth, some good olive oil and a dash of sherry vinegar and serve it as gazpacho.

Create a zingy cocktail sauce by adding some horseradish and lemon juice.

Use the sauce as the base for vegetable soup.

Sauté some garlic and red chili flakes, add the sauce and cook until slightly thickened, then season with olive oil, some freshly grated parmesan and fresh basil and serve over pasta or polenta.

Keep it simple and keep it seasonal! Betty Kaiser's Cook's Corner is dedicated to sharing a variety of recipes that are delicious, family oriented and easy to prepare. Contact her at 942-1317 or email bchatty@bettykaiser.com

Spiders earn their keep as natural pest control in the garden

BY KYM POKORNY
OSU Extension Service

In corners and along baseboards, on ceilings and spun between shrubs, spiders crawl through our lives this time of year.

“Spiders are on the move right now because they're looking for a mate,” according to Gail Langellotto, an entomologist with Oregon State University's Extension Service.

“The domestic house spider is one that regularly makes its way into houses in fall, and if you haven't seen one in the past, it can be a startling sight,” she said. “If you include their legs, they're about as big as a silver dollar.”

OSU Extension Master Gardeners have been getting questions about whether there are more spiders this year and if they're bigger, Langellotto said.

“There aren't more spiders than usual and they aren't larger,” she said. “Most likely, you're just seeing a species you haven't seen in the past.”

Langellotto recognizes the fear some people have toward spiders but points out they have attributes, including their fascinating process of spinning beautiful webs and their predatory nature, which is an important tool in the garden. “Plus, they're just cool and awesome,” she said. “They don't feed on plants; they catch and kill things. They are natural pest controls. I hope people will learn you don't have to be afraid of them. If you have room in your heart and garden, don't try to kill them with pesticides.”

Even if you can't bring yourself to like spiders, keep in mind they aren't easily killed by pesticides. The amount and concentration needed is often higher than what's necessary to kill insects, which poses greater risk to humans, Langellotto said. If they're inside sweep them up and escort them outside. In the garden, just leave them be and they'll eventually make supper of each other or get eaten by reptiles and birds.

For people who want to encourage spiders — and Langellotto acknowledges that doesn't apply to everyone — she recommends adding more trees, shrubs and perennials to provide anchor points for web-building spiders to spin their webs.

Spiders spin different types of webs, she said. Some build funnel webs, while others make sheet webs. Some have combs on their hind legs that they use to “back comb” silk and make a messy-looking tangle web.

But it's the classic orb weavers that people associate with spiders. They dispense strands of silk, which fly through the air, hit something and stick. Then the spider starts to fill in the middle, creating the intricate, lacelike webs that trap prey so efficiently. Although the silk is stronger than steel in terms of mass and more flexible than a rubber band, it's not difficult to swipe webs away as you walk through the garden.

Of the 700 to 800 species of spiders in Oregon, only the black widow has the potential to cause serious harm to humans. This spider is found in the drier areas of southern Oregon and east of the Cascades more commonly than

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