



BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

Never fear — spiders can be your friends

I have a long history with spiders. As a child it was spider nightmares, then daddy long-legs in the flower beds (not really spiders). Then it was the fear of black spiders, cousins showing me black widows in well houses, and the big spiders in prune orchards.

Along came a tarantula at a San Diego Community College biology class and the spider fear began to flip to fascination. A lot of things dropped into perspective. I started observing spiders and refused to kill them; fell in love with jumping spiders for their bright colors and racing stripes; and even ended up with a pet wolf spider on my bookcase.

You may think that the pet spider on the bookcase was an itty bitty one, but that's not true. She was a gray and brown wolf spider with heft and large enough to see that her legs were hairy. I didn't name her, but grew fond of her just the same.

Every night between 7 and 8 o'clock she came out of her canning jar tunnel to add to her mat-like web. It really looked like she was dancing on the web. The web gradually covered the entire front of my bookcase. Eventually I had to search for the book I needed from the front of the bookcase, then go around to the back of the bookcase to extract it for use. Luckily it was a freestanding bookcase!

All this prelude and talk about spiders is leading up to my recommendation to you to tolerate spiders, rather than kill these truly fascinating creatures. Spiders are carnivores and will not harm your garden plants and will protect them from the plant predators by eliminating them. They prey on insects that pester your plants.

Spiders can help control flies, mosquitoes, moths, beetles, wasps, and other insects, keeping their populations down. This helps protect you from being bitten or stung while you're working in your garden and it can help your plants by reducing the number of hungry insects in the area.

Garden Chores

- A few degrees of frost protection can be gained by covering tender plants with sheets or lightweight fabric row covers.
 - Continue harvesting tender crops before frost.
 - Harvest squash and pumpkins before frost. For best storage quality, leave an inch or two of stem on each fruit.
- If you have garden questions or comments, please write: greengardencolumn@yahoo.com Thanks for reading!

Hollandaise Sauce



Cristina M. Flores/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Fast and foolproof hollandaise sauce over asparagus.

LIQUID SUNSHINE

By Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Some people are scared of hollandaise sauce. They shouldn't be. How can anything this good be frightening?

Hollandaise sauce is like liquid sunshine — it's even the color of sunshine. It is impossibly light, yet decadently rich. It is like a custard you can pour that makes everything it touches better.

It is sublime. It is the taste of happiness, if happiness were slightly lemony.

And yet, it has a reputation for being difficult to make. But it isn't, really. It's just that sometimes something goes wrong with it.

Occasionally a hollandaise sauce will break. That is, the butter separates from the egg and it looks curdled and kind of disgusting. The sauce typically breaks if the butter is added too quickly or if the sauce is made at a too-high temperature.

It shouldn't happen if you're careful, but it happens to everyone, even professionals. It can even be fixed, although it won't be quite as good as if it hadn't broken.

But there is no need to fear, because so far we have only been talking about making hollandaise the traditional way. There is also another way to make it that is foolproof. Well, more or less foolproof.

Traditional hollandaise requires a great deal of whisking over the moderated heat of

a double boiler. But the foolproof method only requires a blender and a bit of patience.

It may not be as rich as the traditional hollandaise, but the foolproof method comes with the stamp of approval from Julia Child. Besides, less-rich hollandaise is still plenty rich.

Hollandaise is basically butter, egg yolks and lemon juice, lightly flavored with salt, pepper and maybe cayenne pepper. Served over eggs benedict, it is perfection. When matched with asparagus, it is unsurpassable. Spooned over poached salmon, it is the quintessence of elegance.

It tastes good, too.

I first made a batch of hollandaise sauce the traditional way. You begin by whisking together some egg yolks with a splash of lemon juice. Then you place that bowl on top of barely simmering water and slowly and continually whisk in melted butter — drop by drop at first, and then in a thin, steady stream.

You need one hand to pour the butter, one hand to work the whisk and one hand to hold the bowl to keep it and the pot from sliding around the stove. It's easy. But if you only have two hands, you don't really have to hold the bowl.

The bowl's temperature is vital. If the eggs get too hot they will scramble. If the sauce gets too hot it will become too thick. If the

sauce does get too thick — you should be able to pour it — take the bowl off the heat and whisk in a few drops of warm water. If it is still too thick, whisk in a few more drops.

If you get it right, you should have a sauce that is almost effervescent. It shimmers on the tongue.

The foolproof blender method is easier and faster. If you've never had it made the traditional way, you may think it is the best sauce ever.

You start off with egg yolks and lemon juice in a blender, along with salt and pepper. With the blender going full speed, you slowly add melted butter — again, drop by drop at first, and then in a thin, steady stream.

The sauce is divine. Asparagus just isn't asparagus without it.

TRADITIONAL HOLLANDAISE SAUCE

Yield: 4 servings (1 cup)

- 4 egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 stick (½ cup) unsalted butter, melted
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- Pinch salt

See **Sunshine** / Page 3B

The temptation of tomatillos

Editor's note: Sarah West is a writer, cook, and gardener who lives in Cove. She is fascinated by the stories lurking behind vegetable varieties: their flavors, uses, and ability to create or sustain a sense of place. She'll be exploring those topics in this column, and hopes to entice you to a potluck at some point.



EATER'S DIGEST
SARAH WEST

Outside of Central America and the southwestern United States, tomatillos are little more than an afterthought — something we have come to know primarily as a salsa flavor at the taco bar, not an ingredient at home. Even its name, meaning "little tomato," suggests it came second, though most archeologists believe the tomatillo was cultivated by ancient Mesoamericans long before its world-famous cousin.

Roughly the size of a cherry tomato and cloaked in a lantern-shaped husk, tomatillos look like unripe tomatoes. Both are members of the nightshade botanical family and are native to Central America. Hold a tomatillo in one hand and a cherry tomato of the same size in the other

and you will feel one difference: the tomatillo's drier flesh makes it seem lighter and less substantial, a suspicion you can confirm by taking a bite. Unlike a tomato, whose juices ooze with concentrated flavor compounds and sugar, a raw tomatillo comes off as overly lean — bitter acidity and a hint of sweetness.

Cook that same tomatillo in a small amount of water or on the grill and in a few minutes its sharpness mellows. Cell walls burst open releasing natural pectin and juices that quickly thicken into syrup. The tomatillo, parading as simple and slight, creates its own luscious sauce with just a few minutes of heat.

That sauce, with a vegetal, citrus-infused flavor, cuts through fats like a cool breeze on an August afternoon, which explains its association with fatty taco fillings or buttery

guacamole.

It's no coincidence that a raw tomatillo seems to the tongue like a lime in tomato costume. Lime flavor is dominated by acidic compounds, primarily citric acid with dashes of malic and succinic acids, both of which add to the fruit's complexity and are nearly absent in lemons. Tomatillo acidity is primarily citric and malic, a combination that lends its flavor that lime-without-the-peel quality — lime flavor, in its fullness, is a cocktail of acidity, sugar, and aromatic compounds released from the skin.

In traditional Mayan and Aztec cuisines, tomatillos played the role of a pre-Columbian citrus. It's hard to imagine a plate of Mexican food without that quintessential slice of lime, but citrus trees hail from Asia and did not reach Central America until the 16th century.

See **Tomatillos** / Page 2B

Photo by Sarah West
Tomatillos have a variety of uses.

