

Springing into the gardening season



WENDY SCHMIDT
BETWEEN THE ROWS

Forsythia is usually the sign that spring is here in all its yellow cheerfulness. It blooms at the change of season when winter leaves and spring arrives. Their judgment has slipped, or that snow we just had was fake news. Winter is being a bit more clingy — a spoiled child who is trying to stay up later. Face it: who among us hasn't bent the rules?

There are many kinds of forsythia, seven species of the genus oleaceae (the olive family). Some types and varieties bloom more prolifically, or are of different form (upright shrub or lax form), most are about the same color of yellow, and they vary in size, and bloom time. None are native as they originated in Eastern Europe and east Asia. They grow in zones 5-8; we need cold tolerant, northern varieties.

Forsythia need full sun in order to bloom well, a pH of 6.5 to 7.5, fertile soil and good drainage. They are really a plain-Jane plant, hardly

noticeable when not in bloom.

There are named varieties, the best of which are "lynwood gold," "northern sun," "meadowlark" and "golden bell."

Simple truths about gardening

- It takes 5 years to make a garden. This is due to the time it takes for plants to get established (maturity, height, etc).
- The gardener must walk attentively through the garden daily.
- Flowers and vegetables grow well only in well-worked, humus-enriched soil. You get a lot of little roots rapidly.
- Transplant only in late afternoon, early evening, or on an overcast day. The carbohydrates (stored energy) of the plant is highest at the end of the day.
- It is a wise gardener who knows his own weeds.
- Feet ruin good soil structure. Use stepping stones, paths, or boards. If you compact your soil, the roots can't get air and drainage can be impaired.
- Pulling out is as important as putting in.
- Nitrogen and water make plants grow. Lack of water makes lower leaves brown. Too much

water makes a dead plant. Be careful of over-watering.

- Shallow watering leads to a build up of salt.
- Never fertilize a dry plant — you will burn it.
- If you don't know what you want, you'll never achieve it.
- Gritty soils do not hold nutrients. Feed half as much twice as often in sandy soil.
- When using perlite, wet it first so the dust doesn't get into your lungs.

Garden Chores

- Asparagus and rhubarb roots should be planted as soon as the ground can be worked.
- Plant beets, carrots, parsley, and parsnip seeds outdoors.
- Start seeds of tomato, pepper, and eggplant indoors to give them a head start.
- Clean up old iris foliage before new growth begins.
- Apply sulfur to the soils around acid-loving plants such as azaleas, rhododendron, holly, and dogwood. Use a granular formulation at the rate of 1/2 pound per 100 square feet.

Take a moment to enjoy this happy time of year. Happy gardening!



Barbara Eckstein/Contributed Photo

Forsythia is one of the first shrubs to bloom in the spring.

VEGGIES

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From cancer patient to nutrition coach

Readers also learn the story of how the 27-year-old New York City resident found healing through running and food after being diagnosed at age 14 with Stage III Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Though she was safely in remission by her senior year, she still felt the stigma of being known as the sick girl. It was only after running a 5K to raise money for a local cancer charity that she finally felt completely healed. "On that starting line, I felt powerful, in control of my life, like I hadn't before cancer," she writes.

Years in the making, the book was born of the Instagram account and blog of the same name she started in 2013 to connect with other runners of the same mindset. A communications student at Fashion Institute of Technology at the time, she'd fallen down the rabbit hole of sports nutrition books, and wanted to share.

As she explains on a call from her apartment in New York City, "I wanted to understand the 'why' behind everything I was eating."

Endurance athletes, especially females, had little guidance on food and nutrition at the time. To help other runners achieve their nutritional and athletic goals, she logged what she ate pre- and post-workout, along with simple recipes that her followers could make at home.

What she didn't expect was that professional runners like Kara Goucher would soon be among her biggest fans.

Bildirici was sitting in her college cafeteria 10 years ago when the Olympian first made a comment on one of her posts. She recalls taking a screenshot. "It was insane!" she says. "I just loved everything she embodied."

Not long after, Goucher asked if she would do a cooking demo and talk nutrition at an upcoming runners' retreat in Napa, California. Bildirici, who at the time was studying to become a holistic health coach at the Institute of Integrative Nutrition in Manhattan, of course said yes, even if she felt somewhat intimidated.

"She told me that she liked how I made healthy

eating approachable," she says.

The experience, Bildirici says, was life-changing. "I never felt more at peace in my life."

In 2015, Goucher invited her to speak at a second retreat in Colorado, and oh, by the way, would she also be willing to come early and cook for her? Bildirici ended up not only staying in Boulder but also cooking for her mentor leading up to the Olympic Trials in Los Angeles in February 2016.

"It was scary but a great opportunity," Bildirici says. "So I gave it my all."

That led to more opportunities with other Olympians, world champions and other professional athletes. In 2018, with her initial college dream of working in the music industry a distant memory, she became the North American Nutrition Coach for the Adidas Runners community, offering one-on-one nutrition counseling for runners. She was 24.

On a cold and rainy day that October, to mark 10 years since her cancer diagnosis, she also completed an Ironman competition in Louisville, Kentucky, to raise thousands for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

"It was important to not have cancer define me," she says.

Keeping it simple

With her star rising, Penguin Books reached out to see if she wanted to do a book. Feeling she had all the right people in her corner, including world-class runners Colleen Quigley and Emma Coburn in addition to Goucher, she said yes. When she started writing it in 2020, the pandemic made it easy for her to meet deadlines, as well as experiment in the kitchen with new recipes.

Putting pen to paper in such an evergreen fashion, she says, also afforded her the opportunity to share her cancer story more widely for the first time, "without crying all the time."

"So many people have gone through something like this," she says. "And when I was sick, I just wish I had someone to look up to."

While nutrient-rich vegetables play a starring role in her cookbook, Bildirici says "Running with Veggies" focuses not so much on what's healthy or unhealthy but on the importance of whole foods in addition to plenty of veg-

gies. She also is a huge fan of keeping it simple, with recipes that can be prepared quickly using very basic ingredients.

She doesn't want to spend her entire day in the kitchen and knows you don't, either. As such, "I'm not going to ask you to head to the specialty health store for teff powder. I know where everyone is coming from. If it's not easy, you're not going to cook it."

Breakfast recipes include one for overnight oats with a mixed berry chia jam that's perfect for people who are bleary-eyed in the morning, or are traveling to a race but only have access to a hotel mini fridge. You'll also find a gut-healthy brown rice bowl topped with kimchi, avocado and fried egg, and peanut butter and banana pancakes made with oat and almond flours.

For drink lovers, there's an entire chapter on every runner's quick-fix beverage — smoothies — but with this added nutritional boost: All include at least one vegetable and a healthy fat like avocado or tahini to balance the flavor and texture.

Packed with mouth-watering photos, the book also serves up more than a dozen grain and noodle bowls enhanced with nuts, spices and sauces, and almost as many "plates" — a category that includes everything from tacos to vegan meatloaf to veggie burgers and even a couple of fish dishes.

Because all work and no play is no fun, the cookbook also includes portable "adventure snacks" you can stick in your backpack to fuel all different kinds of activities — think bars, trail mix and no-cook date bites. Her plant-based desserts are made with natural sweeteners like maple syrup and dates, which can help runners replace their glycemic stores after a workout.

All, Bildirici says, reflect what you might find in her kitchen or on her dinner table on any given night. It's also representative of how she cooks for her athlete clients, "and even when I'm having people over for dinner," she says.

And if you're not particularly athletic? The book is for you, too, because good nutrition isn't just for runners and other athletes. It plays an important role in everyone's lives.

"It's for anyone who wants to get in the kitchen and eat a little healthier,"

she says, even if you don't follow the recipes to a T.

People are always looking for that magic superfood, Bildirici says, but it's really about a holistic lifestyle. Part of that is changing the way you think about food and your relationship with it.

"You have to reach for the right foods, and have them ready in your fridge to go."

ALMOND BERRY OVERNIGHT OATS

Once you make the berry jam, this carbohydrate-rich recipe takes a minute to prepare for the next morning. Soaking the oats overnight makes them easier to digest, because it helps break down their natural enzymes. I used unsweetened almond milk and a combination of raspberries and blueberries for the jam.

For oats

- 1 cup unsweetened nut milk
- 1/2 cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 teaspoon chia seeds
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch sea salt
- 1 tablespoon unsweetened natural almond butter, for garnish
- Raspberries and blueberries, for garnish
- Chopped toasted almonds, for garnish

For jam

- 2 cups fresh or frozen mixed berries
- 1/2 lemon, zested
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 navel orange, zested and juiced
- 1/4 cup chia seeds
- 1/2 cup water

Prepare jam: In a small saucepan, combine berries, lemon zest and juice, orange zest and juice and chia seeds. Add water and bring to boil. Reduce heat and allow to simmer for 20 minutes, stirring frequently.

Remove from heat and mash fruit with a potato masher or wooden spoon. Allow to cool for 20 minutes, or until mixture is thickened. Store in an airtight container in fridge for up to one week.

Prepare oats: In a small saucepan, heat nut milk until simmering. Meanwhile, place 2 tablespoons jam in a pint-size mason jar.

Top with oats, chia seeds, cinnamon, vanilla and salt. Pour warm milk over the top and stir to combine. Cover with a lid and place in the refrigerator overnight.

Before serving, stir the oat mixture again, then top with almond butter, fresh berries and toasted almonds.

Serves 1.

SUPERGREEN PASTA

Pasta is a favorite dish for runners because it's a good source of carbohydrates. This recipe swaps traditional wheat pasta for penne made from brown rice. Instead of tomato sauce, it's topped with a fresh-tasting chimichurri-like green sauce. It's fantastic.

To make almond Parmesan, blend 1/2 cup raw almonds, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast and 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder in mini food processor until finely ground.

For sauce

- 1 cup packed spinach
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1/2 cup raw walnuts
- 3 tablespoons each fresh parsley, cilantro and mint
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- Freshly ground pepper

For pasta

- 8-ounce package brown rice penne, lentil penne or any plant-based pasta
- 1 1/2 pound head of broccoli, cut into florets
- 1 tablespoon avocado oil
- 1-2 cups baby spinach
- 2 tablespoons each roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley, cilantro and mint, for garnish
- 1/2 cup almond Parmesan, optional

Make sauce: In the carafe of a high-speed blender, blend spinach, garlic, walnuts, herbs, olive oil, vinegar and water until well combined. Season with salt and pepper, then set aside.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, add the pasta and cook for 2 minutes less than the package instructions advise.

Meanwhile, line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. On the prepared baking sheet, toss the broccoli with avocado oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast for 15 minutes, tossing halfway through, until golden brown and crisp-tender. When finished roasting, remove broccoli from oven and allow to cool slightly.

Drain pasta, lightly rinse and transfer to a large bowl. Add the green sauce, roasted broccoli and baby spinach to the pasta and toss together. Garnish with

chopped mint, parsley and cilantro, and sprinkle with almond Parmesan, if using. Serves 4.

CHILI-SPICED SALMON WITH MANGO SALSA

Professional runner Kara Goucher contributed this family-favorite recipe for salmon. "It fuels my body with good protein and lots of healthy fats," she writes, making it an excellent dinner choice after a hard workout session. The mango salsa is also terrific with tortilla chips.

For salsa

- 1 mango, pit removed, peeled and diced
- 1/2 medium red onion
- 1/2 red bell pepper, cored, seeded and diced
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and finely diced
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- Sea salt to taste

For salmon

- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 4-6 ounce skin-on salmon filets
- Coconut rice, to serve

Make salsa: In medium bowl, combine mango, onion, bell pepper, jalapeño, cilantro and lime juice. Season with salt and set aside to marinate while you prepare the fish.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In small bowl, mix together garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, chili powder, cumin and salt.

Place filets on the prepared baking sheet and sprinkle each one with the spice rub. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes on the middle rack, or until fish is opaque, cooked through and flakes easily with a fork.

Place filets on a serving platter and top with mango salsa. Serve with coconut rice.

Serves 4.

— All recipes from "Running on Veggies: Plant-Powered Recipes for Fueling and Feeling Your Best" by Lottie Bildirici



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