

FOR AN AWARD-WINNING NEW YORK CHEF, BITING INTO ONE EXTRAORDINARY APRICOT YEARS AGO OPENED HIS EYES AND HEART TO THE MAGIC OF FARMERS' MARKETS AND THE PURSUIT OF PRODUCE PICKED AND EATEN AT THE PERFECT MOMENT IN TIME.

Many years ago, as a young line cook wandering through a farmers' market in Provence, I stood in front of a mountain of apricots. It was the second week in August, prime time not just for French housewives on the prowl, with their large straw baskets and sharp eyes, but also for the famed tree fruits of the region. A portly farmer was shaking her outstretched hands at me with insistence, as if to say, "Look here, you silly young American. This is the essence of Provence. It's all here, right now. It will be gone soon, and you'll be sorry!"

I could have sworn she said, "*Mon dieu*, you must eat." By then I was homesick—for some English to be spoken and for some loving care—and I was exhausted. I had been working six days a week for two long, blisteringly hot months in the kitchen of a mad chef, my head half buried in a sauté pan, frying zucchini flowers and preparing pistou. I knew strikingly little about Provence but didn't care: After two years in France, cooking for various chefs, I'd decided to end this apprenticeship early and return home. I spent my last day walking around the farmers' market, and that's when I came upon the apricots.

The fruit was like nothing I had ever seen: plump to nearly bursting, and blushed a deep red.

"Apricot?" I asked, to be sure.

"*Oui, monsieur, des abricots*," she said, pointing to the large sign in front of my face.

I started to pick one out. But as if swatting a fly, Madame brushed aside my hand and my feeble attempt at identifying ripe fruits. She lovingly played her fingers like a keyboard over her small treasures, landing on one with her middle finger and tapping it several times very gently. "*Parfait*," she said—not to me, but to the apricot, holding it up in the morning light. She wrapped the apricot in soft tissue paper (ignoring my protestations of wanting to eat it right then), collected my money, and handed the fruit to me, almost reluctantly.

I took a bite. I cannot say exactly what happened next. I was at once entranced and utterly confused—not because I was tasting the best apricot of my life, but because I was tasting an apricot I had never imagined could exist.



the eating

In that moment of confusion and bliss, gripping the apricot close to my mouth, I attempted in my best French to inquire about this tiny miracle. “*C’était né, où?*” (This was born, where?) is what I came up with. I suddenly teared up and looked away. It was the emotion of the moment—my two years in France were over, I was returning home to an unknown future—as much as it was the taste of the fruit.

Madame farmer turned red herself. She walked around her stall and put her arm around me.

I spent the next half hour learning how to grow the most perfect apricots, about the pruning, the climate, and the orchard that had been with her family for two generations. I purchased more than I could carry, stuffing several into my jacket pocket and feeling weighed down by the plump fruit. I ate all I could in those moments I had before leaving France.

Every August since then, when I’m at a farm stand—almost every day (where else is there to be?)—I’m reminded of the Madame farmer and her apricots. And I don’t need to be tasting actual apricots. Blackberries, corn, cranberry beans—they’ve all become part of summer’s flavor adventure.

I have a theory on why a meal built around a trip to the farmers’ market tastes so good. There’s the physiological explanation: Produce picked in later stages of ripeness (since it doesn’t have to travel as far as the supermarket kind) means produce that’s more mature and therefore tastier.

There’s another explanation, this one emotional. All along the conventional food chain—from seed to farmer to distributor to market—cost is the determining factor. It’s no surprise that the food that comes out on the other end is nameless, faceless, and for the most part, flavorless.

But when you visit a farmers’ market, you are, to some extent, engaging in a part of agriculture’s culture, whether you’re shaking the hand of the farmer who grew your produce, learning about a variety of corn or the way it was grown, or just surrounding yourself with people in the single-minded pursuit of good food.

It’s what unfolds every morning at the farmers’ market—not just food grown in the right way and picked at the perfect time, but food with a story. Even in our most auspicious moments in the kitchen, that’s better than any seasoning you or I could provide.

Dan Barber is the executive chef and co-owner of Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns, both in New York. He won the 2009 outstanding chef award from the James Beard Foundation.



WHEN CHOOSING FARM-FRESH INGREDIENTS, LET YOUR SENSES GUIDE YOU. ADMIRE THE RICH COLOR OF AN EGGPLANT. BREATHE IN THE SWEET PERFUME OF BERRIES. FEEL THE SATISFYING HEFT OF A RIPE TOMATO IN YOUR HAND. AND LISTEN TO THE FARMER WHO RECOMMENDS SOMETHING NEW. TAKE HOME YOUR TREASURES, PREPARE THEM SIMPLY, AND SAVOR THE TASTE OF FOODS AT THEIR FINEST.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARCUS NILSSON



GRILLED CHICKEN WITH
cucumber, radish,
AND cherry tomato RELISH

A DISH TO RELISH Grilled chicken is a summer staple, and here's a welcome new accompaniment. The colorful relish is cool, crisp, and juicy, with a touch of heat. While the chicken cooks, the vegetables—cucumber, radishes, red onion, and cherry tomatoes—steep in a vinegary mix until they're lightly pickled. Fresh mint leaves give the dish an herbal fragrance and finish.



corn, cranberry bean,
AND fried okra SALAD

SUMPTUOUS SALAD Succotash inspired this dish, opposite, which takes a delicious departure from the original. Shelled fresh cranberry beans have a meaty texture and a nutty flavor; corn cut from the cob adds sweetness. Okra gets a cornmeal coating that makes it almost croutonlike. Everything is tossed with lamb's quarter (an edible weed), baby spinach, basil leaves, and a mustard vinaigrette.

HARVEST BRUNCH In late summer, making ratatouille is a natural choice; serving it with poached eggs, top right, adds a twist. The Provençal vegetable stew is usually simmered, but here, many of the ingredients are roasted and the tomatoes aren't cooked at all, which keeps the vegetables distinct. Rustic toast soaks up all the juices. If your farm stand carries eggs, take advantage: The fresher the egg, the more buttery tasting the yolk and the more tender the white.

COOL SOUP This tangy chilled purée, right, gets its striking color from earthy beets and red bell peppers. They're cooked with shallots and then blended into a silken soup. Goat cheese, a traditional partner to beets, lends creaminess. A squeeze of lemon juice and a sprinkling of sea salt heighten the flavors.



RATATOUILLE—eggplant,
bell pepper, zucchini,
tomato—WITH POACHED EGGS

The image shows a rustic outdoor dining table with a stone top. In the foreground, a light green plate holds a stack of ratatouille with a poached egg on top, garnished with herbs. A blue napkin is tucked under the plate. In the background, another plate of the same dish is visible, along with a glass of beer, a salt shaker, and a notebook with a pen. The background is a soft-focus green lawn.



sweet
red pepper—
beet soup

The image shows three glass bowls filled with a vibrant red soup, topped with a dollop of white cheese and a sprinkle of black pepper. The bowls are arranged on a dark blue wooden surface. In the foreground, there are several brass spoons and a small white plate with lemon slices. A small bowl of white cheese is also visible in the upper right corner.



BEST berry COBLER

OLD-FASHIONED CHARMER

This classic cobbler, left, is topped with a simple, rich biscuit dough that lets the berries really shine. The dough comes together in seconds in a food processor. Blackberries or raspberries may be used, so choose your favorite—or whatever looks best when you're shopping. A dash of cinnamon rounds out the berries' flavor. The biscuits are brushed with cream and given a light coating of sugar before baking, resulting in a crust with crunch. Vanilla ice cream is a sublime accompaniment.

DESSERT TO GO Why should kids have all the fun? These ice pops, opposite, will delight even the most discerning grown-ups, and they make a handy dessert for a backyard barbecue—no forks, spoons, or plates required. The combination of pale-green honeydew melon and cream gives the warm-weather treat a luminous hue and lusciousness. Honey and chopped salted pistachios add a subtle Middle Eastern accent.

Created by Shira Bocar, Stephen Johnson, and Sarah Smart

SEE RECIPES SECTION
SEE GUIDE FOR SOURCES

BROWSE RECIPES BASED
ON SEASONAL INGREDIENTS
AT [wholeliving.com/
seasonal-foods](http://wholeliving.com/seasonal-foods)



honeydew AND CREAM
ICE POPS WITH PISTACHIOS



THE RECIPES



PEEL AND EAT Gulf shrimp are grilled shell-on and tossed with a cilantro-peanut sauce and a spritz of fresh lime juice. See the recipe, page 142.

Season with salt and pepper. Juice 1 orange half into bowl. Add shrimp and corn, and toss to coat. Refrigerate until chilled, 10 to 15 minutes.

3. Arrange lettuce leaves on each of 4 plates. Top with a scoop of shrimp-corn mixture. Top with avocado and mint, and drizzle with juices from bowl. Juice remaining orange half over tops, and season with salt.

Ripe for the Eating

CORN, CRANBERRY BEAN, AND FRIED-OKRA SALAD

SERVES 6 TO 8

Lamb's quarter is an edible weed also known as wild spinach. Find it at farmers' markets, or use more baby spinach.

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE

- 2 tablespoons white-wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper

FOR THE SALAD

- 8 ounces fresh cranberry beans, shelled (1 cup)
- Coarse salt
- 2 ears of corn, shucked and halved
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- ¼ cup cornmeal
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 4 ounces small okra, stems removed, halved lengthwise and quartered if large
- 1 ounce (2½ cups) lamb's quarter
- 1 ounce (2 cups) baby spinach
- ½ cup fresh basil, leaves torn if large

1. Make the vinaigrette: Whisk together vinegar and mustard in a medium bowl. Pour in olive oil in a slow, steady stream, whisking constantly until emulsified. Season with salt and pepper.

2. Make the salad: Place beans in a medium saucepan; cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer until beans are tender, about 15 minutes. Season water generously with salt. Using a slotted spoon, transfer beans to vinaigrette. Toss to coat. Let cool.

3. Meanwhile, return water to a boil. Add corn, and cook until tender, 6 to 7 minutes. Transfer to a plate, and let stand until cool enough to handle. Using a serrated knife, remove kernels. Transfer to beans, and toss.

4. Heat ½ inch vegetable oil in a, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat. Whisk together cornmeal and flour in a medium bowl. Rinse okra in a colander under running water

to dampen. Working in batches, toss okra in cornmeal mixture to coat, and add to skillet. (Check to make sure oil is hot enough by tossing a pinch of cornmeal into the pan. If the cornmeal sizzles, the oil is ready.) Fry okra until golden, about 2½ minutes per side (reduce heat if okra darkens too quickly). Using a slotted spoon, transfer okra to a paper-towel-lined plate. Season with salt and pepper.

5. Arrange lamb's quarter, spinach, and basil on a platter. Spoon corn and cranberry beans on top. Add fried okra.

GRILLED CHICKEN WITH CUCUMBER, RADISH, AND CHERRY TOMATO RELISH

SERVES 6

A jalapeño chile gives this relish some heat. For a milder version, remove the ribs and seeds.

- ¼ cup white-wine vinegar, plus more to taste
- ¼ cup water
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed
- 1 small jalapeño chile, stem, ribs, and seeds removed (optional), quartered
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 English cucumber (12 ounces), peeled, seeded, and cut into ¼-inch dice
- 5 radishes, very thinly sliced
- 8 ounces cherry tomatoes, halved, or quartered if large
- 1 small red onion, cut into ¼-inch dice
- 6 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (2 pounds)
- Vegetable oil, for grill
- 1 cup fresh mint, torn into ½-inch pieces, plus sprigs for garnish

1. Bring vinegar, water, sugar, garlic, jalapeño, and ¾ teaspoon salt to a boil in a small saucepan. Remove from heat, and let stand for 15 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve; discard solids. Let cool completely.

2. Combine cucumber, radishes, tomatoes, and onion in a medium bowl. Pour in vinegar mixture, and toss to coat.

3. Preheat grill to medium-high. Season chicken breasts on both sides with salt and pepper. Lightly oil the grill grate. Working in batches, grill chicken until cooked through, 6 to 7 minutes per side. Transfer to a platter, and let stand for 10 minutes. Stir mint into relish. Season with salt and pepper, and drizzle with vinegar if desired. Spoon relish on top of chicken, and garnish with mint sprigs.

RATATOUILLE WITH POACHED EGGS

SERVES 8

- 1 large eggplant (about 1 pound), cut into ¾-inch chunks
Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 large tomatoes, cut into ¾-inch chunks
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for brushing
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme, plus leaves for garnish
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
- 1 medium onion, halved and sliced ¼ inch thick (3 cups)
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 zucchini (1 pound), cut into ¾-inch chunks
- 2 yellow bell peppers (14 ounces), stems, ribs, and seeds removed, cut into ¾-inch chunks
- 8 slices rustic bread
- 8 large eggs

1. Place eggplant in a colander. Season generously with salt; toss to coat evenly. Let drain for 30 minutes. Rinse eggplant, and pat dry with paper towels.

2. Toss tomatoes with 2 tablespoons oil, the thyme, and oregano in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper.

3. Preheat oven to 450°. Toss together eggplant, onion, garlic, and 2 tablespoons oil in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Spread vegetables out into an even layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Toss zucchini and bell peppers in bowl with remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Season with salt and pepper. Spread out into an even

layer on another rimmed baking sheet. Roast vegetables, rotating sheets once, until golden and tender, about 45 minutes. Immediately transfer cooked vegetables to tomato-herb mixture. Stir to combine. Let cool.

4. Brush slices of bread with oil. Place on a rimmed baking sheet, and lightly toast in oven, about 2 minutes.

5. Fill a large, shallow saucepan with 4 inches of water, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium. When water is barely simmering, break 1 egg into a small bowl. Gently tip bowl, carefully sliding egg into water. Repeat with remaining eggs. Cook until whites are set but yolks are soft, 3 to 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer eggs to a paper-towel-lined plate to drain.

6. Spoon ratatouille over bread slices. Top each with a poached egg, and season with salt and pepper. Garnish with thyme.

SWEET RED PEPPER—BEET SOUP

SERVES 6 TO 8

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 shallots, chopped (½ cup)
- 3 red bell peppers (1½ pounds), stems, ribs, and seeds removed, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 red beets (1 pound), trimmed, peeled, and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 cup water
- 3½ cups homemade or store-bought low-sodium chicken stock
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 ounces soft goat cheese, crumbled (about 1 cup)
- Lemon wedges, for serving

1. Heat oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add shallots, and cook, stirring occasionally, until shallots are translucent and tender, about 4 minutes. Add bell peppers and beets, and stir to coat. Add water and chicken stock, and bring to a boil. Cover partially, and reduce heat. Simmer until

beets are tender when pierced with a knife, about 1 hour.

2. Remove saucepan from heat, and let cool slightly. Stir in lemon juice, and season with salt and pepper. Working in batches, purée mixture in a blender until smooth. Transfer to a large bowl, and refrigerate until chilled, up to overnight.

3. Divide soup evenly among 6 or 8 bowls. Sprinkle each with goat cheese. Season with pepper, and serve with lemon wedges.

BEST BERRY COBBLER

SERVES 6 TO 8

The amount of sugar and cornstarch needed will depend on the sweetness and ripeness of the fruit. Taste the berries. If they are sour, add an extra ¼ cup sugar in step 2. If juicy, add an extra 1 teaspoon cornstarch. To catch any juices that may bubble over when baking, place the baking dish on a rimmed baking sheet or lay a piece of foil on the rack below the cobbler.

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 ounces (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- ¾ cup cold heavy cream, plus more for brushing
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ cup sugar, plus more if needed and for sprinkling
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch, plus more if needed
- 6 cups (3 pints) blackberries or raspberries
- Vanilla ice cream, for serving (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Pulse flour, baking powder, and salt in a food processor until combined. Add butter, and process until mixture resembles coarse meal. Transfer mixture to a large bowl, and add heavy cream in a slow, steady stream, mixing with a wooden spoon until dough just comes together. Divide dough into 9 pieces, and loosely form each into a ball.



Whisk together cinnamon, sugar, and cornstarch in a bowl. Add berries; toss gently to coat. Transfer mixture to an 8-inch square baking dish. Top berries with dough balls, spacing evenly. Brush dough with heavy cream, and sprinkle with sugar. Bake until berries are bubbling in center and biscuits are golden brown, 45 to 50 minutes. Transfer dish to a wire rack, and let cool slightly, about 30 minutes. Serve with ice cream if desired.

CRUNCH TIME Pistachios provide a salty counterpoint to sweet melon and honey and bring contrasting texture to the creamy ice pops. See the recipe, right.

HONEYDEW AND CREAM ICE POPS WITH PISTACHIOS

MAKES 16

- 1 honeydew melon (3 pounds), halved, seeded, and cut into 1-inch chunks
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup honey
- ½ cup (1 ounce) roasted, salted pistachios, coarsely chopped

1. Working in batches, purée honeydew in a blender until smooth. You will have about 4 cups purée. Stir together cream and honey in a medium bowl. Stir in honeydew purée.

2. Sprinkle about 1 teaspoon pistachios into each of 16 ice-pop molds (crateandbarrel.com). Pour honeydew-cream mixture into molds. Freeze until slushy, about 2 hours. Insert an ice-pop stick into each. Return to freezer until completely frozen, about 6 hours more or up to overnight.

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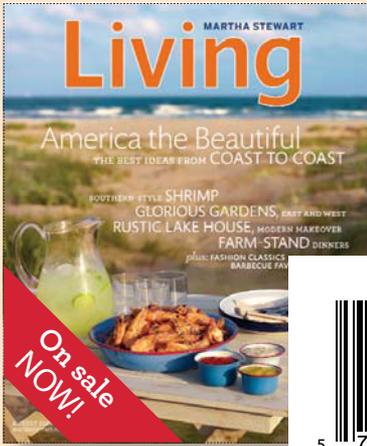
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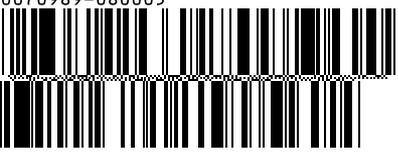


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