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Basic Roots Community Foods

www.basicrootscommunityfoods.kaysue.org

APRIL 20, 2011

Full Swing into Spring: featuring the Harbingers of this season Asparagus & Wild Garlic Ramps

Asparagus ranks right alongside the hyacinth as a sure, spriggy herald of Spring. Too often our members miss the Asparagus season because of the timing. Yay for us this Spring! Their season is short, so short that it is prized & pricey\$\$ because of the demand. And if you are especially fond of it, it's brief timing is just a whiff. Growing up on the farm in Illinois I would often wander the roadside ditches, harvesting wild Asparagus that grew as tall as the fence rows when setting seed. It was easy to find because the brown stalks from wintering over helped set the Spring stage for foraging.

When preparing your Asparagus for your favorite recipe, try this simple **Rule of Thumb** when determining the tough part of the stem to the tender. It's called the "**bend-easy zone**". It's a tip you want to remember if you ever come across wild Asparagus growing along the countryside and still applying to your own cultivated shoots as well as the Asparagus you receive today. Asparagus is what we call a "shoot" vegetable. Bamboo is another example. One day it's about 3" tall, the next it's a foot. "Shoots right up" It is common for the bottom of a shoot vegetable to be tough and woody while the upper portion remains tender. When harvesting shoot veggies, do not tug straight up on them but rather feel along the stem to determine the extent of the "**bend-easy zone**": this will tell you how much of the shoot will be tender enough to enjoy. If it doesn't flex, it is too tough & woody to eat.

Go up further on the stem & where it flexes it should make a crisp snap. You now have the most tender part of the shoot with no need to peel even.

Wild Ramps fit into the same dilemma that Asparagus has-short season thus prized & pricey\$\$. We have been growing garlic ramps for about 10 years now at Fruit Loop Acres, waiting for the day that people would catch on to these and finally, folks have gotten crazy about them. They should be. Ramps belong to the *Allium family* that covers everything like the wild invasive onion in your backyard, leeks, garlic, scallions—actually being the most abundant & widespread of all wild food plants in all of North America. Our variety is the *Allium canadense*, meaning "garlic that originated in Canada". Treat this "wild" delicacy the same way as you would scallions. Peel off the outer lay of each, wash & chop to use in place of any recipe that calls for garlic. If you're sautéing in oil or butter it will just take a minute or 2 to brown them. Palm Sunday Sue & I foraged Asparagus & the wild Ramps from our yard & she made a kick ass omelet, first sautéing chopped Ramps in Ghee butter while I snapped the Asparagus into bite sized pieces & steamed them (my favorite way to prepare Asparagus). Meanwhile Sue cracked opened the eggs, folding in Swiss Connection cottage cheese & at the very end, added the very tender Asparagus. Yummy.

Sauteed Spinach with Wild Ramps

This is the easiest way to cook Spinach—don't preboil the spinach, just stir it into a sauté pan with the garlic ramps. You can cook the Spinach with Olive oil or with butter, but if you serve this spinach at room temperature, use the oil because the butter will congeal.

**Spinach 2 TBS olive oil or butter
Garlic Ramps, cleaned & chopped
Salt & Pepper English Walnut Meats**

Stem, wash & drain the Spinach.

Heat the olive oil or butter in a sauté pan over medium heat & add chopped ramps & walnuts. Let the Ramps & nuts brown briefly. If using butter, keep the heat low enough so you don't scorch the butter. Now turn the heat up to high while adding in about 1/3 of your Spinach. It will wilt, then add another 1/3. When it has wilted, add in the remaining Spinach. Continue cooking until the liquid it releases evaporates, 3-5 minutes. Season to taste with salt & fresh ground pepper. Serve immediately.

SAUERKRAUT SALAD

1 jar Sauerkraut, drained, saving the liquid for later use.
3/4 C grated Carrots 1 Med. Onion, chopped
2 Apples, chopped
6 large Olives, pitted & sliced
2 TBS vinegar 1 TBS Horseradish 3 TBS Oil
Toss ingredients together with 2 forks until well mixed.
Add the kraut liquid if need be. Chill for a few & serve on a bed of lettuce.

Rule of thumb with any canned goods is to remember to press lid, making sure it's still sealed. I always smell the smell alone is an indicator of spoilage.. Do a visual check too product when I open it because . Products should look pretty..

ASPARAGUS CHINOISE

SLICE ASPARAGUS DIAGONALLY INTO 1" LENGTHS & SAUTÉ IN A LITTLE OIL UNTIL GREEN & SLIGHTLY TENDER CRISP; ADD SLICED WATER CHESTNUTS AT THE VERY LAST MINUTE WITH A FEW DROPS OF SOY SAUCE. SERVE WARM.

BASIC STEAMED ASPARAGUS

I find that this is the easiest way to cook this Spring freshness. You can control the texture better, say if you like it tendercrisp. The green color holds well too. If you boil the spears it's easy to overdue it and you will be left with limpy Asparagus. Ehhh.

Prepare by breaking off the tough part by using the "*bend-easy zone*" method. Now you can snap them into pieces or steam them whole by bundling them with a string. If they won't fit into your steam basket, steam them upright bundled. Add about an inch of water to your pot & bring to boil. Turn down the heat & gently simmer, checking frequently for tenderness to taste. It won't take long. Notice how really *green* Asparagus is. Drain if boiling. If steamed place in dish.

Now it's time to anoint them.

Basic Buttered: Toss hot spears with 2 pats of butter, a little salt & serve. This is the unadulterated method that brings out the true flavor of Asparagus.

Hot Asparagus with Parmesan Cheese: Toss with butter and sprinkle grated Parmesan Cheese to taste. Cut back on the salt if you using this anointment.

Hot Asparagus with EVO: Instead of butter, toss with EVO, salt & pepper.

Cold Asparagus with Vinaigrette: Purge the hot, cooked Asparagus in ice water.

(don't want it to go limp!). Pat dry. Immediately before serving, toss the rinsed, drained, and dried spears with 1 TBS excellent wine vinegar & 2-3 TBS EVO. Salt & pepper.

Hot Asparagus with mayonnaise: Yum. Toss spears with a little bit of EVO, salt & pepper. Spoon Mayo on the side for each person to use on their own.

The Virtues of Fresh PARSLEY: I recently was checking out the nutritional value in one of my favorite cookbooks—Laurel's Kitchen & was surprised to learn that Parsley kicks butt.! Low on calories, high in Vitamin A, C & Calcium. Sounds like we should just eat it raw in salads. But on the following page are some delightful recipes, cooking with your parsley.

OLD-FASHIONED SHIRRED EGGS (pronounced "sheared")

Shirring, an old-fashioned technique for preparing eggs, has probably been around as long as eggs and fire. It calls for baking shelled, unbeaten eggs in a buttered tort or gratin dish just until set.

The immediate appeal in baked eggs is their ease & reliability when cooking for a crowd—say on Easter morning. Perfect with a little salt & pepper, yet more elegant when nestled in the baking dish with sautéed mushrooms, creamed spinach, cheesy polenta & potatoes. We have tried this recipe a few times & really enjoy them this way. It really does take almost 20 min to bake them so keep that in mind while preparing other dishes to go along with them.

For 2 Servings: 4 large Eggs 2 tsp Butter, plus extra for buttering your dishes
Salt & Pepper TBS minced fresh Parsley

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 325 degrees. Lightly butter 2 round or oval gratins or other baking dishes about 5" in diameter. Break 2 eggs in each dish. Dot each dish with tsp of butter cut into small pieces. Bake until the whites are set and the yolks are thickened, 15-18 min. Season with salt & pepper & sprinkle with parsley before serving. Dishes will be hot.

- **Variations:** Before baking, add a sprinkling of paprika or your hot pepper seasoning, some grated Parmesan & chopped ramps.

Stewed Berries—good for Blueberries, Strawberries, Raspberries

Cover bottom of pan with water to depth of 1/4 inch. Add berries, cover, and simmer gently over low heat 10-15 minutes or until berries are tender. Add more water if necessary.

Remove from heat & add sugar to taste. Chill & serve as a dessert or sauce.

BLUEBERRY SLUMP

So named for the way it looks

2 C Blueberries, frozen 1 C Water 1/2 C Sugar, more or less to taste
3/4 C sifted Flour pinch of salt 3/4 tsp baking powder 1/4C Cream

Combine berries, water and sugar. Cook over low heat until berries are soft. Sift flour, salt and baking powder together. Add cream and mix lightly. Drop by tablespoonfuls into blueberry mixture. Cover and cook 15 min on stovetop.

GREEN RICE CASSEROLE

Here's another good recipe using Parsley. Vegetarian & gluten free.

2 1/2 C cooked brown rice 2 Eggs, beaten
2 TBS Oil 2 C Milk
1 Onion 1 tsp salt
1 C Parsley, chopped, without stems 1/2 tsp dill weed
1 C grated Swiss cheese Ramps to taste, chopped

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Dice onion, chop ramps & sauté in oil until browned. Combine remaining ingredients and add to onion, garlic mix. Bake in a greased 2-Quart casserole dish for about 30 minutes, or until bubbly around the sides. Serves 4-6.