Notes from the Kitchen: Vegetable Backgrounds

Parsnip (Pastinaca sativa)

The word “parsnip” is believed to derive from the Latin *pastinaca*, or “two-pronged dibble,” a farming tool that makes holes in the soil for planting seeds. The writer Boris Pasternak’s name translates as Boris Parsnip.

The parsnip has been cultivated in Europe since ancient times but has become less popular over the centuries. When sugar and honey were rare imported luxuries, the parsnip was prized as a sweet-tasting food. It was also valued as a starch before the potato arrived from America.

I love the sweetness that parsnip imparts to soups, especially chicken soup. I also like to stir-fry a mixture of sliced parsnips and halved brussels sprouts with a splash of soy sauce, and then add a little water and a cover and steam them until soft.

Bok Choy, Tatsoi, and Chinese Cabbage

All of these vegetables have the species name *Brassica rapa* but whereas the first two are in the Chinensis group, Chinese Cabbage is in the Pekinensis group. *Brassica rapa* has hundreds of subspecies and taxonomists do not agree on what to call them.

Tatsoi is also called rosette bok choy because all those little lollipops grow in a circle. In past years the farm sometimes grew yau choy, labeled “Autumn Poem” at the pickup, which has long green leaves with a yellow flower—very delicious.

Potato (Solanum tuberosum)

Although the potato originated in South America, it only came to North America by first traveling to Europe and then being brought here by Irish immigrants.

Elizabeth Schneider claims, “In most potatoes, flaking skin, uneven color, and “dirtiness” are signs of freshness, not inferiority. Potatoes coated with a dusty layer of soil are likely to be in better condition than clean, shiny ones; soil protects the skin and helps keep it dry.”

I highly recommend *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan, one quarter of which is given over to an essay on genetic modification of the potato and the evils of monoculture. Many large farms only grow an extra-long variety that MacDonald’s requires for its fries.

Leek (Allium ampeloprasum)

Wild leeks probably originated in the Mediterranean. They were cultivated by the ancient Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, Welsh, and Scots, among others. A first-century Roman cooking manual has 17 recipes for leeks, including leeks stewed with shell beans in white wine, beets and leeks in raisin sauce, leeks and celery poached with honey and pepper, leek sauce with pepper for braised meats, fish fillets with leeks and coriander, and leeks with truffles.

My favorite leek recipe is the one for Marinated Leeks in *From Asparagus to Zucchini*, which is sold at the farm. It makes a mild pickle.

—Kathy Diamond

Information on this page comes from *Vegetables from Amaranth to Zucchini* by Elizabeth Schneider (William Morrow, 2001), a large hardback book not to be confused with the cookbook *From Asparagus to Zucchini* sold at the farm.
**West African Peanut Soup**  
from Sundays at Moosewood Restaurant

2 cups chopped onions  
1 Tbsp oil  
1/2 tsp cayenne or other ground dried chiles (or to taste)  
1 tsp grated peeled fresh ginger root  
1 cup chopped carrots  
2 cups chopped sweet potatoes  
4 cups vege stock or water  
2 cups tomato juice  
1 cup smooth peanut butter  
1 Tbsp sugar (optional)  
1 cup chopped scallions or chives

Saute onions in oil until translucent in large frying pan. Stir in cayenne and ginger. Add carrots and saute a couple more minutes. Mix in potatoes and stock or water, bring to a boil, and simmer 15 minutes, until veges are tender.

In a blender or food processor, puree veges with cooking liquid and tomato juice. Return puree to soup pot. Reheat soup gently. Stir PB into warm puree until smooth. Add sugar. Serve topped with chopped scallions/chives.

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**Zahlouk**  
*(Eggplant and Tomato Salad)*  
from *Cooking at the Kasbah*, by way of Marla’s mother

1 eggplant (about 1 lb.)  
2 Tbsp. olive oil  
4 tomatoes (peeled, seeded, and chopped)  
1/2 tsp. paprika  
1 tsp. ground cumin  
4 cloves minced garlic  
2Tbsp. minced flat-leaf parsley  
2Tbsp. minced cilantro  
salt and pepper to taste  
1Tbsp. fresh lemon juice

Prick eggplant with a fork. Bake in a 375 degree oven until tender, (50 min–1 hr.). Let cool, scoop out flesh, and set aside. (See NOTE below).

Heat the oil in a heavy saucepan or skillet over medium heat, add tomatoes, and stir occasionally, for 5 minutes or so. Add eggplant and seasonings (except salt, pepper, and lemon juice). Reduce heat to low. Cover and cook until most of liquid evaporates (20–30 min.) Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to serving dish and stir in lemon juice. Serve at room temperature. Great as a spread also.

NOTE: Nifty way to get eggplant flesh out of its skin: Take a slice off blossom end (where the green cap is) Then start ot the bottom of the eggplant, and SQUEEZE the pulp out!

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Community Farms Outreach is a nonprofit organization dedicated to farmland preservation, hunger relief, and education.

CFO’s Annual Appeal is underway.  
Make a donation to support the farm and our hunger relief and education programs. And come to our potluck Annual Dinner  
Sunday, November 21".