

Solstice = strawberries + scapes + super supper

By MARY MCCLINTOCK

Saturday is summer solstice ... the longest day of the year here in the northern hemisphere. To me, solstice is the time for savoring sweet strawberries and producing garlic scape pesto for future use.

What are your favorite strawberry recipes? Please share!

Never been formally introduced to a garlic scape? Let me explain. Garlic plants

Savoring the Seasons: Enjoying local food year-round

have three sections — underground bulbs we call “garlic,” green leaves that look like straight spears, and, this time of year, flowering stalks with a closed flower bud, called a scape. Scapes have a round cross-section and a characteristic curled shape. Farmers and gardeners cut off scapes to keep the plant from flowering, encouraging growth of the bulb. Garlic scapes are available now in many local markets, farmers markets and farm-stands.

What do they taste like? Comparing scapes to garlic bulbs is like comparing green onions to onions. Scapes have a somewhat milder, “greener” garlic taste.

What to do with them? Enjoy raw scapes cut into small pieces and used like green onions in salads or as topping for chili or soup. Or saute scapes or cut them into chunks and stir-fry them with other vegetables. Use raw scapes to make pesto like traditional pesto uses raw basil, or try Dan Botkin’s delicious grilled alternative (see below). If you make pesto from raw scapes, Dan recommends using very fresh, tender ones.

Garlic scapes pesto is a great way to preserve the scape harvest. I freeze pesto in freezer zip-lock bags. Get some scapes and enjoy them, now and later.

Summer solstice is also time to plan the annual Free Harvest Supper. I first learned about garlic scapes pesto from Juanita Nelson who sold garlic scapes at the Greenfield Farmers Market for many years. This year’s Free Harvest Supper will be on Juanita’s birthday, Aug. 17.

For the 10th year since Juanita dreamed up the first Free Harvest Supper, a group of volunteers is planning that special late summer evening when we’ll gather on the Greenfield Town Common and savor the sweetness of community and abundance.

Each year around solstice, I wonder if enough folks will come forward to help organize the event. We’re seeking an entertainment coordinator, a food coordinator and other organizers. Later, we’ll need “many hands” to make light work at the supper.

And, perhaps some of Juanita’s friends will freeze garlic scapes pesto for the Free Harvest Supper chefs to use as a birthday surprise for Juanita.

Want to help? Email the committee at info@freeharvestsupper.org or call 413-773-5029 or email me at mmcclinto@yahoo.com.

10th annual Free Harvest Supper of Locally Grown Food, Sunday, Aug. 17, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Greenfield Town Common/Court Square (corner of Main Street and Bank Row). Enjoy a free meal of locally grown food prepared by local chefs, accompanied by live music, children’s activities, educational displays, and a “Really, Really Free Market” of locally grown food. Seeking volunteers, food donations, and organizational displays. For more information, visit:

www.freeharvestsupper.org or contact info@freeharvestsupper.org or call 413-773-5029.

This Week We’re Eating ... GRILLED GARLIC SCAPE PESTO

By Dan Botkin, Laughing Dog Farm, Gill (based on Mary’s notes from chatting with Dan at the Greenfield Farmers Market in June, 2008)

Garlic scapes are best when well-cooked. To make pesto, first parboil the scapes until they’re soft, then grill lightly until they’re the consistency of butter (like well-cooked leeks). Puree in a food processor with oil, some lemon juice and sea salt. If you’d like, add parmesan-type cheese and nuts. Dan uses chestnuts, and doesn’t measure precisely, but you can use a basil pesto recipe and replace the basil with scapes or find a garlic scapes recipe online. Experiment to see what proportion of ingredients you like best.

Mary McClintock lives in Conway and has been a member of two CSA farms. She’s a long-time vegetable gardener and member of a Franklin County local foods group. She has presented workshops on eating locally grown foods and is an organizer of the Free Harvest Supper. Send suggestions and recipes to mmcclinto@yahoo.com



MARY MCCLINTOCK

Blue Plate Special



A touch of the tandoori in Greenfield

By TINKY WEISBLAT
Special to The Recorder

I have always loved Indian food, so I was thrilled last year when I saw a handwritten sign at a storefront on Main Street in Greenfield indicating that an Indian restaurant was coming to town in 2013.

The Clay Oven opened in December and now serves dinner every day as well as a lunch buffet. As its name would indicate, the centerpiece of the restaurant’s kitchen is a tandoor (clay oven) imported from India. Tandoors are a centuries-old tradition in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The deep, rounded ovens emit strong, even heat and give dishes like chicken tandoori their distinctive slightly smoky flavor.

The Clay Oven’s kitchen isn’t visible to the public, but photographer Paul Franz and I were lucky enough to be invited in for a visit a couple of weeks ago. We watched as owner/chef Sam Sharma quickly cooked naan (a flatbread with lots of body) on the sides of the hot clay oven.

Sharma’s partner, Madan Rathore, then showed us how to make chicken tikka masala, adding vegetables, spices and a delectable yogurt sauce to chunks of chicken that had been marinated and precooked in the tandoor.

The two explained that they specialize in north Indian cooking, the best known and most popular style of Indian food internationally. The Clay Oven is slowly introducing dishes from other parts of India, however. These include a lentil soup from South India and a seafood dish from Goa in eastern India.

Rathore and Sharma both hail from India’s capital, New Delhi, although they met through friends in Holyoke about five years ago. Sharma spent many years in the hotel business before migrating to food. Rathore began life in the United States in the computer field.

“I taught for a while in a computer school,” he told me. “I would work for 10 or 12 hours, then come home and cook. I was always cooking. It gave me peace.” He decided to make cooking his vocation and worked for several years in an Indian restaurant in New Mexico.

He moved to Greenfield in 2002. “I realized we needed an Indian restaurant here,” he recalled. He and Sharma, who lives in Granby, hire as many local



Naan is cooked by sticking the dough to the wall of the hot clay oven while Chicken Tandoori cooks on skewers at The Clay Oven in Greenfield.

Recorder/Paul Franz

people as possible and buy their produce from area farms when they can.

Rathore explained that while many Indian restaurants use artificial colors and preservatives, the partners try to avoid these, letting vibrant Indian spices add color as well as flavor to their culinary creations.

I asked how their partnership is working out.

“We are family,” Sharma said. Rathore smiled and added, “We get heated up, but we cool down, too ... We are open. Our heart is open.”

They agreed that their debates about cooking and life have enhanced both their cuisine and their partnership.

Most home cooks don’t have a clay oven, so Rathore explained how to use a traditional oven to precook the chicken in the recipe below. The recipe has many steps, but most of them can be accomplished in advance so that the actual assembly of the dish takes about 10 minutes.

For special items such as spices and mustard oil, the Clay Oven owners suggest that readers look online or visit an Asian specialty market like Spices of Asia in West Springfield.

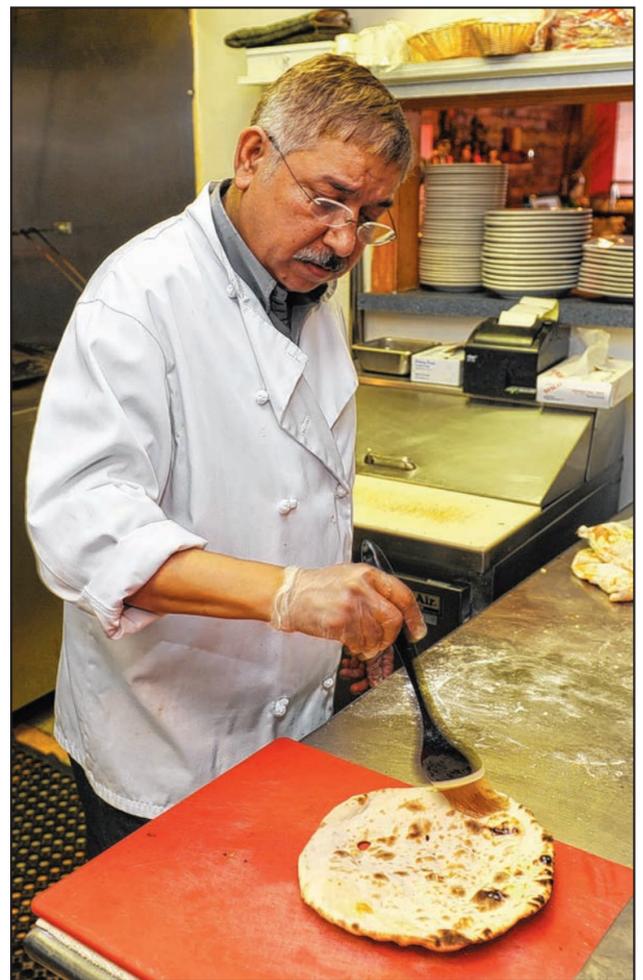
CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA Serves 2.

- for the chicken*
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
 - 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
 - ½ teaspoon ground fenugreek
 - ½ teaspoon ginger and garlic paste (cut them up in equal proportions and mash them into a paste)
 - 1 teaspoon lemon juice
 - 1 pinch black salt (or regular salt)
 - ½ teaspoon ajwain seeds
 - ½ teaspoon mustard oil (if you cannot find this, grind mustard seeds to create it)
 - 2 teaspoons strained yogurt (the Clay Oven makes its own yogurt and strains it through cheesecloth; Greek yogurt will do)



Recorder/Paul Franz

Madan Rathore makes Chicken Tikka Masala at The Clay Oven.



Recorder/Paul Franz

Sam Sharma prepares some naan at The Clay Oven in Greenfield.

- 2 teaspoons sour cream
 - 1 chicken breast, cut up into chunks
- for the onion sauce*
- 1 black cardamom seed
 - 1 green cardamom seed
 - 1 clove
 - ½ cinnamon stick
 - 1 bay leaf
 - 1 star anise
 - 1 pinch coriander seeds
 - 1 pinch cumin seeds
 - vegetable oil as needed for frying
 - 2 onions, diced
 - 1 to 2 tablespoons tomato paste

- for the yogurt sauce*
- 1 cup cream or half and half
 - 1 cup yogurt
 - 1 teaspoon

- for assembly*
- vegetable oil as needed to coat a frying pan
 - ½ teaspoon ground fenugreek
 - ½ teaspoon ajwain seeds
 - marinated, precooked chicken chunks (see above)
 - ¼ cup tomato plain sauce (homemade or commercial)
 - 2 tablespoons prepared onion sauce
 - 1½ to 2 cups prepared yogurt sauce
 - ½ cup water
 - 2 tablespoons fresh fenugreek leaves, finely chopped
 - 1 large handful coarsely chopped vegetables (onions, red bell pepper, green bell pepper and maybe a little jalapeño for spice), previously sautéed
 - 2 tablespoons butter
 - chopped fresh cilantro for garnish (optional)

First prepare the marinade. Combine all ingredients except for the chicken pieces; then stir in the chicken. Marinate for at

least 2 hours in the refrigerator. (Overnight is fine as well.)

Place the chicken in a roasting pan and bake it for about 40 minutes at 350 degrees, turning occasionally.

Next, prepare the onion sauce. Grind the spices. Heat the oil in a skillet. Add the spices and stir gently. Add the onion pieces and cook over low heat for about a half hour, stirring from time to time, to caramelize the onions. Remove the sauce from the heat and stir in the tomato puree.

Prepare the yogurt sauce by mixing all of the ingredients.

Now you are ready to assemble the dish.

Heat a skillet over medium heat. Coat the skillet with vegetable oil and heat briefly. Stir in the ground fenugreek and ajwain seeds, followed by the cooked chicken. Add the tomato sauce and 2 tablespoons of the prepared onion sauce.

Stir in 1½ to 2 cups of the yogurt sauce and ½ cup water. Cook the mixture for 5 minutes, stirring constantly.

Toss in the fenugreek leaves and the precooked vegetables. When they are heated through add the butter. Stir until it melts.

Garnish with fresh cilantro leaves if you wish. Serve with rice.

Tinky Weisblat of Hawley is the author of “The Pudding Hollow Cookbook” and “Pulling Taffy.” If you have a suggestion for a future Blue Plate Special, please email Tinky at Tinky@TinkyCooks.com. For more information about Tinky, visit her website, www.TinkyCooks.com.