

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Green Experiment: A Taste of Spring Without the Wait

Chef Annie Pettry of Decca in Louisville, Ky., on experimenting with unripe fruits and vegetables

Decca chef and owner Annie Pettry's green tomato gazpacho with crème fraîche, grapes, dill, and pumpernickel croutons.

PHOTO: WILLIAM DESHAZER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN**

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As cooks wait for the juicy produce of spring and summer to come in season, many are discovering the pleasures of unripe fruit and vegetables.

So-called green produce offers “a variety of textures and flavors that you wouldn’t achieve in ripe fruits or vegetables,” says chef Annie Pettry, who opened Decca in Louisville, Ky., in 2012. “You can often get a larger arc of flavor” if you combine unripe and ripe versions of the same thing in a dish, she says. “I also like using them in the spring because it’s kind of a preview of what’s to come—a hint of the excitement from the summer.”

When working unripe produce into a dish, Ms. Pettry first considers its particular flavors. “There’s definitely acidity and bitterness, texture and then a floral or vegetal flavor,” she says. “They work well in both sweet and savory dishes.”

Because they are so firm, unripe ingredients often “hold up well to being shaved and pickled,” Ms. Pettry says. Green mangoes and papayas are “really firm so you can shave them and shred them and put them in salads.”

Chef Annie Pettry, in Decca in Louisville, says unripen produce in spring offer ‘a preview of what’s to come—a hint of the excitement from the summer.’ *PHOTO: WILLIAM DESHAZER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Ms. Pettry likes to make chutney with green mangos and jalapeños, noting that the acidity in unripe ingredients makes them work particularly well as condiments for seafood or heavy meats. “They’re crunchy and have acidity and bitterness that really cuts through the meats,” she says.

Fried green tomatoes are well-known, but Ms. Pettry also favors less predictable ways of cooking them. “I like to put pickled green tomatoes in a Bloody Mary,” she says. “That bright green tartness, plus the vinegar, really complements the sweetness of the tomato juice.”

Sometimes, Ms. Pettry likes to cut green tomatoes into cubes and dress them in a vinaigrette with shallots and cucumbers. They add “a little bit of tomato flavor that’s bright and sharp,” she says.

Green almonds, which can be found at gourmet grocers and some farmers’ markets, are a favorite of Ms. Pettry’s. “When you get them really immature they’re kind of delicate—almost gelatinous and milky on the inside,” she says. Since the shells haven’t hardened yet, “you can eat the fuzzy husk.”

Green mango mousse with coconut panna cotta and green mango curd. *PHOTO: WILLIAM DESHAZER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

The flavor is quite different from that of ripe almonds. “It’s grassy and astringent and has a tart apple kind of flavor,” Ms. Pettry says. Texture-wise, “it’s chewy and soft. Once it’s pickled, it’s great in salads or stews. Or shave it raw on desserts or gelatos.”

She takes a similar approach with green strawberries, which lack sweetness and can be used in savory dishes. “I like basil with green strawberries,” says Ms. Pettry, who may use the combination as a garnish or condiment, “dressed with simple syrup.” Or “do a green strawberry gazpacho and maybe a garnish like a green strawberry salsa verde,” she says. “Green strawberries have that tart crunch, floral notes, but also some deep, juicy strawberry flavors,” making them work well sliced in just about any salad. “It’s more a vegetable than a fruit at that point.”

The possibilities are numerous with unripe produce, Ms. Pettry says. “If you see an unripe ingredient in a market, buy it and experiment,” she says. If you’re uncertain about how to use it, perhaps start by substituting it in a recipe that calls for the ripe version. “Substitute a raw almond for a mature almond in pesto,” she says. The most important thing: “Don’t be scared of it.”

Roasted Green Tomato & Cheese Tart With Semolina Crust and Crushed Red Pepper Honey

(4-6 servings)

PHOTO: WILLIAM DESHAZER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Semolina crust:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup semolina flour
- 1½ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1¼ cup butter, unsalted, cold
- 10 tbsp. ice water
- 2 cups beans or pie weights

1. Mix together flour, semolina, salt, and sugar
2. Add the butter using your fingers, a pastry cutter, or a food processor. Quickly mix until it resembles coarse meal with pea-size pieces of butter.
3. Fold in the ice-water a little at a time until the dough just comes together (you may not need all of the ice water).
4. Form the dough into a disk, wrap in plastic, and let rest for at least an hour in the refrigerator (the dough can be frozen at this point for up to a month).
5. Preheat the oven to 375.
6. Roll the dough on a lightly floured surface until it is a quarter-inch thick and slightly larger than the tart pan. Transfer dough to the tart pan and press into the bottom, corners, and sides. Fold the extra dough over the sides of the pan and roll the rolling pin over the top of the pan to cut off excess dough. Chill for at least 10 minutes.
7. Blind bake: Poke holes in the dough with a fork, line with parchment paper, fill with beans or pie weights. Cook for 20 minutes, remove the parchment and beans. Cook for 5 more minutes. Let cool.

Roasted Green Tomatoes:

- 2 green tomatoes
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- ¼ tsp. salt

1. Preheat oven to 300.

2. Cut the green tomatoes into half-inch slices and place on a cookie sheet. Drizzle with olive oil and salt.

3. Cook for 20 minutes or until the center of the tomato is tender. Cool.

Cheese Filling:

- ½ cup cheddar
- ½ cup Parmesan
- ½ cup Gruyère
- 1 large egg
- 4 tbsp. mayonnaise
- 4 tbsp. heavy cream
- 1 tbsp. shallot, minced
- ½ tsp. garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. sherry vinegar
- pinch chili flakes
- ½ tsp. lemon zest
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/8 tsp. pepper

1. Preheat oven to 375
2. Mix all ingredients together in a food processor. Pour into pre-baked tart shell.
3. Arrange the roasted green tomatoes on the top of the filling. Drizzle with one tablespoon of olive oil.
4. Bake for 20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes clean. Cool.

Crushed Red Pepper Honey:

- 4 tbsp. honey
- 1 tbsp. cider vinegar
- ¼ tsp. chili flakes
- ¼ tsp. salt

Warm all ingredients in a small sauté pan. For a milder honey, strain out the chili flakes.

Garnish & Serve:

- Crushed red pepper

- 5 Tbsp. honey

1 Tbsp. Extra Virgin Olive Oil

2 Cups arugula

5-10 leaves basil

1/2 lemon, juiced

pinch sea salt

Dress arugula and basil with olive oil, lemon juice, and sea salt. Place atop the tart and drizzle with crushed red pepper honey.

Green Garbanzo Risotto with Feta and Mint

(6 servings)

Green Garbanzo Purée:

PHOTO: WILLIAM DESHAZER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

- 1 cup green garbanzos

- 2 cup arugula
- 1 cup cream, warm

pinch of salt

1. Blanch green garbanzos and arugula separately in heavily salted ice water. Drain garbanzos, squeeze out arugula.
2. Purée green garbanzos, arugula, warm cream, and salt in a blender.
3. Immediately chill in an ice-bath to preserve color. Check seasoning.

Risotto:

- 1 tbsp. butter
- ½ onion, medium yellow
- 1 cup Arborio rice
- 2-4 cup vegetable stock, warm

Salt to taste

- ¾ cup green garbanzo purée
- ¼ cup crème fraîche
- 1 tbsp. chives
- ½ cup blanched garbanzos
- 4 tbsp. feta
- zest of one lime
- 20 leaves mint

1. Soften onions in butter.
2. Add Arborio rice and stir over medium heat to toast the rice.
3. Add warm stock half cup at a time, stirring often, waiting until the liquid is almost fully absorbed before adding more. When the rice is tender, stop adding the stock.
4. Fold in green garbanzo purée, crème fraîche, Parmesan, and chives. Stir vigorously to incorporate. Add a little more stock if the risotto is too thick. The consistency should be saucy. Check seasoning.
5. Serve: Divide the rice between 4 plates. Sprinkle with green garbanzos, feta, lime zest, and mint.

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