

FOOD & WINE

Fall makes for sweet cooking

Harvest crops are full of sugar that should be exploited to the fullest

RANDY SHORE

VANCOUVER SUN

What the sun does best is make sugar, with the help of plants, of course.

Spring crops like spinach and arugula are lean and peppery, but late summer and fall vegetables and fruits are loaded with sugars. Think squash, carrots, onions, tomatoes, grapes, pears and apples.

As a cook you should make time to properly exploit sugar, according to chef Marc-Andres Choquette, kitchen boss at Tableau Bar Bistro and Homer St. Cafe. Heat and time make magic where sugars are concerned.

"We follow the seasons and right now we use what our farmers in Kelowna and Lytton have for us," said Choquette. "Around late August through mid-October they bring us products that are at their peak in terms of sweetness and sugar content. We want to pair these things with braised and roasted dishes."

Humble ingredients such as squash, onions and leeks don't start out sexy, but they get that way given time.

"When you slow it down to create a nice broth or sauce, let it break down and release its flavour and bring out the sugars," he said. "It gives really nice body to cooking liquid."

Choquette's original recipe — roasted squash wedges with pears and apples, topped with crumbled hazelnuts — does all of the above.

"This works as a cold salad or a warm side dish," he said.

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RECIPE

Farmhouse Sliced Onion Salad

6 large white or Spanish onions

Brine

1½ cups (375 mL) water

1½ cups (375 mL) vinegar

2¼ cups (560 mL) sugar

6 tbsp (90 mL) kosher salt

Dressing

1½ cups (375 mL) mayonnaise

3 tbsp (45 mL) celery seeds

Salt and pepper to taste

Peel and slice the onions thinly, place in a large glass or ceramic bowl. In a large saucepan combine the water, vinegar, sugar and kosher salt. Bring to a boil and pour over the onions. Let stand for three to five hours and drain thoroughly. Combine the dressing ingredients and toss with the onions. Serve with grilled meat.

Serves a party



LIANE FAULLER/POSTMEDIA NEWS FILES



WAYNE LEIDENFROST/PNG

Chef Marc-Andres Choquette prepares a fall harvest dish at Tableau Bar Bistro in Vancouver. It's a great time of year for fresh harvest vegetables.

RECIPE

Roasted Thyme-Rosemary Squash Wedges

With apples, pears and crumbled hazelnuts

1 piece (3lb/ 1.5kg) squash (Ambercup-Kabocha) peeled and cut into ½ inch wedges

2 apples (Pink Lady) cut into 12 pieces

2 pears (Anjou) cut into 12 pieces

4 cloves peeled garlic, sliced, not too fine

1 tall stalk of leek, sliced into ¼-inch coins

2 long stalks rosemary, needles only

10 sprigs thyme, whole

2 tbsp (30 mL) maple syrup

4 tbsp (60 mL) olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

4 tbsp (60 mL) toasted hazelnuts, roughly chopped

Preheat oven to 325 F (163 C).

Combine all ingredients (except hazelnuts) in a bowl and mix well.

Roast on a sheet tray, preferably lined with parchment paper, for about 35-40 minutes; mix every 15 minutes until soft.

Remove from oven, season again to taste, and add the crumbled hazelnuts.

Serve warm with your favourite meat, or cold on a salad with dressing of your choice.

Makes 6 servings



MATTHEW MEAD/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RECIPE

Caramelized Onion and Squash Bisque

ALISON LADMAN

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

There is something so perfect, so satisfying about a bowl of warm squash bisque on a cool fall evening. And it is such a versatile dish, it is easily doctored in so many ways.

Using that blend of versatility and comfort as our inspiration, we created a fast and easy squash bisque that becomes a base for whatever autumn flavours you are craving.

You could, of course, keep it basic and simply top this bisque with a dollop of sour cream. But we also suggest several variations of toppings, including shrimp, bacon and pulled pork.

You also could make the bisque vegan by substituting vegetable broth for the chicken broth and almond or soy creamer for the heavy cream.

Caramelized onion and squash bisque

Start to finish: 1 hour

2 tbsp (30 mL) vegetable oil

2 large sweet onions, diced

2 medium shallots, chopped

1 tsp (5 mL) salt

1 tsp (5 mL) dried Italian herbs or herbes de Provence

2 tbsp (30 mL) apple cider vinegar

1½ pounds (680 g) cubed, peeled butternut squash

3 to 4 cups (750 mL to 1 litre) low-sodium chicken broth

1 cup (250 mL) heavy cream

Ground black pepper

In a large saucepan over medium-high, heat the vegetable oil. Add the onions, shallots, salt and herbs, then sauté for five minutes. Reduce the heat to medium and continue to cook, stirring often, until the onions are soft and brown, about another 20 minutes.

Add the vinegar and deglaze the pan. Add the squash and three cups (750 mL) of the broth, then bring to a simmer. Cover and cook until the squash is completely tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Working in batches, transfer the soup to a blender and purée until smooth. Alternatively, purée the soup in the pot using an immersion blender. Either way, take care when blending hot liquids.

Return the bisque to the heat and stir in the cream. If a thinner bisque is desired, thin the soup with the remaining cup of broth. Heat until just hot. Season with salt and pepper. To serve, finish with any of the following:

Spiced shrimp and scallions

Toss 12 oz (340 g) of small cooked shrimp with 1 tsp (5 mL) five-spice powder. Top with sliced scallions.

Asiago and apple

Stir two finely diced apples into the bisque, then bring back to a simmer. Top with shredded Asiago cheese.

Barbecued pulled pork

Stir together two cups (500 mL) of shredded/pulled cooked pork with 1/3 cup (80 mL) barbecue sauce. Top the soup first with the pork, then a dollop of sour cream and chopped fresh cilantro.

Two corn and herbs

Cook one cup (250 mL) of thawed frozen corn kernels on high in a skillet with one tbsp (15 mL) of oil until lightly browned. Stir the kernels into the bisque along with two tbsp (30 mL) each of chopped fresh tarragon, thyme and chives. Finish by topping the bisque with salted, buttered popcorn.

Maple bacon blue

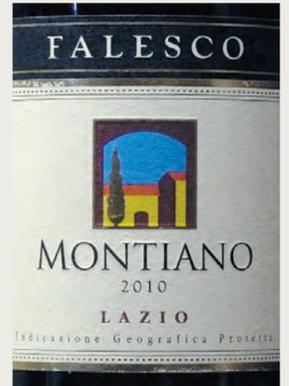
Stir in ½ cup (125 mL) crumbled crisped bacon and ¼ cup (60 mL) maple syrup. Sprinkle with crumbled blue cheese.

Makes 8 servings

IN THE CELLAR



ANTHONY GISMONDI



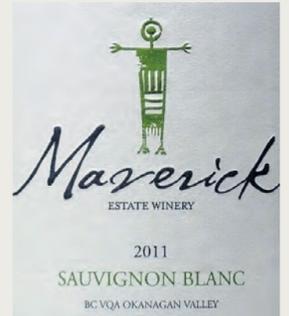
FOR THE COLLECTOR

Falesco Montiano Lazio 2010, Lazio, Italy

Price: \$25 | Score: 89/100

UPC: 008028003000577

A 100 per cent single-vineyard Merlot grown on volcanic soils give us a black cherry, licorice, coffee, smoky, earthy red. We love the concentrated palate and its small-grained tannins. The flavours mix cedar, black cherry, vanilla and olives with a savoury underscore. Fine intensity and length already but this wine needs three to five years to gather itself. Solid value.



B.C. WINE OF THE WEEK

Maverick Estate Winery Sauvignon Blanc 2011, Okanagan Valley

Price: \$18 | Score: 87/100

UPC: 626990140429

Open grassy, lemon peel nose with bits of mineral and just a hint of cardboard. The attack is fresh with more grassy, lemony stony flavours with a touch of sweet grapefruit and lime rind on the finish. Friendly and stylish it just lacks a little electricity to get to the next step. It should work well with local shellfish. A small amount of the wine is barrel fermented to add texture and weight. Should keep a year or two and improve in bottle. Impressive start.

NEWS & EVENTS

The Okanagan Valley remains one ginormous appellation that doesn't make a very enticing case for wine prices over \$15 to \$20. Yet interestingly, while legislators and wineries ignore sub-appellations, winery associations based on simple geography continue to proliferate. The latest is the Westside Wine Trail from West Kelowna. The trail is an 11 km route with the majority of the wineries being within walking distance of each other. Are you curious? Check out the players at thewestsidewinetrail.com

I'm not a big wine gadget guy but I have successfully tested the Cuisipro Magnetic Spot Scrubber which does exactly what it claims to do — clean hard to reach areas' inside decanters and wine glasses. It's basically a two piece rubberized magnet with scrubbing edge you can drag around the inside of a glass or decanter from the outside. It works. Suggested price is \$12. Check it out at cuisipro.com/Magnetic-Spot-Scrubber-plu74-7322.html