K’s Kitchen: Experimenting with fennel

By Kathryn Reed

Don’t worry, Joy assures, me. She tells me there are always recipes in the box so if I’m not familiar with something, it won’t be any big deal.



Well, last week’s community supported agriculture box came with fennel and no recipe. I don’t cook with fennel unless a recipe calls for it and I don’t remember what recipe last called for it so I couldn’t go find it.

I emailed Joy and her sister, Teri, asking for help. Back came a link to a recipe I had just come across. I kept searching on the Internet – mostly because I was curious to learn about different ways to cook this vegetable. Something kept at me to find one where the fennel could be served cold.

Below is my adaptation of many that I read.

I chilled it overnight, which seemed to bring out the flavors more.

First we had this with breakfast, and the next night with dinner. Being in England earlier this month showed me how yummy it is to eat what Americans would consider non-traditional breakfast foods at the first meal of the day – things like roasted tomatoes and sautéed mushrooms.

Serving this fennel dish – just a couple tablespoons on each plate – for breakfast provided a cool, crisp complement to the eggs and potatoes.

I used the round cucumbers because that’s what came in the CSA

box. But any would do. Instead of three round, use one regular one.

A special treat for Sue and me was using the honey from the Lancaster hotel – where we stayed in London. The hotel on the edge of Hyde Park brought a half million honeybees to its roof in 2009. The honey is then used in some of the hotel's restaurants.

Fennel-Cucumber Salad

2-3 fennel bulbs

3 round cucumbers

1 T honey

1 T rice wine vinegar

Thinly slice the white part of the fennel so they are in rings or half rings. Thinly slice the cucumbers, then cut in half. Add honey and rice wine vinegar.

Mix well.

Chill a few hours or overnight.

When cake becomes therapy

By Melissa T. Schultz, Huffington Post

For my birthday seven years ago, I received a diagnosis of breast cancer. It wasn't the kind of present a girl wants to get – not like a pair of earrings, or a pretty nightgown or a

bouquet of fresh flowers wrapped in colored tissue. For a while after my cancer, I couldn't stand the sight of birthday cake. How could something so sweet leave such a bitter taste?

Then, one September morning five years ago, unable to sleep and anxiously awaiting a doctor's appointment later in the day, I found myself staring down at a plate full of white cake with buttercream frosting, spread to resemble the ocean's waves. The cake had called out to me the day before from the refrigerated case at the bakery – the same case I'd walked past countless times and never once noticed its contents.

It's not as if I was going to eat the whole thing in one sitting, mind you. I cut the enormous slice of icebox-cold treat in half, placing one portion on a plate and carefully returning the rest to the refrigerator. Alone at my kitchen counter I ate slowly – savoring every luscious bite, washing the cake down with hot black tea which I drank from a tea cup that once belonged to my grandmother. When I was done, nary a crumb remained, though my anxiety about the day ahead lingered.

The lump I'd found on my neck weeks before was still present and accounted for, serving as a constant reminder that life can be unfair. It led me to my oncologist – a man with a kind face and tender touch despite his occupation in the dark arts – who directed me to make an appointment with a specialist, which prompted me to walk by that bakery case in the first place. Since my original diagnosis of breast cancer, every lump and spot that surfaced anywhere on my body has been examined under a microscope. I've been biopsied and X-rayed, then generally left to stew over a long weekend awaiting the results. Each time, I told myself I couldn't affect change by worrying, and needed to press on with life. So I organized drawers and emergency contact lists, in case I needed to turn over the reins of mothering in an instant, and watched reruns of I Love Lucy till the world felt like a happy place again.

Read the whole story

Serving dinner to guests with restricted diets

By Jessica Bruder, New York Times

No one would touch it.

The offending object? A footlong loaf of bread, stuffed with savory cheese, purchased at a beloved Italian bakery and presented with pride at a recent potluck meal. “This bread is delicious,” I crowed.

The kitchen went quiet. You’d think I had offered up a bouquet of poison ivy. One guest said she was gluten free. Another didn’t consume milk products. The mood lifted only when someone else arrived with a large bowl of quinoa and lentils.

It’s becoming harder for Americans to break bread together. Our appetites are stratified by an ever-widening array of restrictions: gluten free, vegan, sugar free, low fat, low sodium, no carb, no dairy, soyless, meatless, wheatless, macrobiotic, probiotic, antioxidant, sustainable, local and raw.

Read the whole story

Annual North Shore food-wine fest expands offerings

The 27th Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival, long considered one of the region's premier gourmet events, has increased the number of its programs – now offering nine days of festivities.

Another noticeable change to this year's festival is the expansion of the event to every corner of North Lake Tahoe. Visitors can literally pick and choose when and where to partake from the lake's West Shore to Kings Beach and even Truckee, Sept. 1-9.

New events include a Labor Day Weekend Barbecue and Music at West Shore Café and Inn in Homewood (Sept. 1), the Alpen Wine Fest at the Village at Squaw Valley (Sept. 2) and educational classes at Uncorked Wine Bar in the Village at Squaw Valley and at their Tahoe City location (Sept. 3 and 6).

Attendees also have an opportunity to shop, cook, learn and dine with chef and owner Douglas Dale of Wolfdale's Cuisine Unique in Tahoe City at his Farmer's Market/Hands-On Cooking Class (Sept. 6). Participants will shop locally with Dale, cook together and enjoy a four-course luncheon complete with wine pairings.

This year's event will also feature a first-time winemaker dinner at the famed Soule Domain in Crystal Bay (Sept. 6).

The Grape Stomp has changed location and will now be hosted at Tahoe City's Commons Beach and sponsored by Uncorked Tahoe City (Sept. 7).

Although the focus has traditionally been wine, this year's event will diverge featuring a unique beer class as part of its educational seminars on Saturday (Sept. 8) at the Village

at Northstar. The “Belgian Brews and Cheese Pairing” has renowned cheese expert Laura Werlin pairing Belgian-style and IPA-style beer with a variety of domestic cheeses.

Another new class that may pique the interest of festivalgoers is the “2012 Pacific Oyster Wine Pairing Winners” (Sept. 8), which will also be at the Village at Northstar.

Many of the festival’s free programs are also return for Sept. 8 at the Village at Northstar, including outdoor grilling and cooking seminars, gourmet marketplace, hands-on cooking and butchering demonstrations, as well as the ticketed Wine and Brew Walk and Blazing Pans Mountain Chef Cookoff and Charbay Artisan Winery and Distillery Release Party.

The pinnacle of the event, the Culinary Competition and Grand Tasting, returns (Sept. 9) at the Village at Northstar with more than 30 restaurants, caterers and chefs developing bite-sized dishes that pair perfectly with a single varietal or vintage wine, beer or spirits.

For more information about the Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival, a complete list of events and prices, special festival lodging packages and to purchase individual event tickets, go online.

Study: Alcohol in moderation may help menopausal bones

By Allison Aubrey, NPR

It’s well-known that exercise is good for our bones, even as we age, but how about that nightly glass of wine?

A new study of women in their 50s and early 60s finds that moderate alcohol consumption may help prevent bone loss. The women in the study consumed about one-and-a-half drinks per day.

The findings fit with prior studies, including the Framingham Heart Study, which documented that moderate drinkers – people who consume one to two drinks per day – have higher bone mineral density compared to heavy drinkers and people who don't consume alcohol at all.

But sorry guys, this one's just for the ladies.

The latest study, published in the journal *Menopause*, finds evidence that moderate alcohol consumption influences bone turnover. It's a small study, just 40 women, but it helps explain why this may be the case.

Read the whole story

California voters to decide if genetically engineered foods should be labeled

By Marc Lifsher, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – A fight over genetically engineered foods has been heating up in the nation's grocery aisles. Now it's headed for the ballot box.

Voters will soon decide whether to make California the first state in the country to require labels on products such as sweet corn whose genes have been altered to make them

resistant to pests.

Proposition 37 promises to set up a big-money battle pitting natural food businesses and activists against multinational companies including PepsiCo,Coca-Cola and Kellogg. Backers and opponents have already raised nearly $4 million combined for campaigns to sway voters, an amount that's likely to swell into the tens of millions of dollars as the November election approaches.

So-called GMO foods – those made from genetically modified organisms – have been declared safe by U.S. regulators. But concern persists about the unforeseen consequences of this laboratory tinkering on human health and the environment.

The outcome in California could rattle the entire U.S. food chain. An estimated 70 percent to 80 percent of processed foods sold in supermarkets could be affected, industry experts said, along with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. The measure qualified for the California ballot with nearly 1 million signatures; labeling in the state could set a precedent that's followed nationwide.

"This will be a big fight," said Shaun Bowler, a UC Riverside political scientist specializing in initiatives. "This is a popular issue because people are very afraid of the words 'genetically engineered.' And the people who sell this stuff are worried about losing sales."

Backers of the initiative are encouraged by a pair of recent national opinion surveys showing that about 9 out of 10 consumers support labeling. A California-specific poll, released Thursday by the Business Roundtable and the Pepperdine University School of Public Policy, showed Proposition 37 has an almost 3-to-1 ratio of support, with 64.9 percent of prospective voters favoring it, compared with 23.9 percent opposed.

Read the whole story

Truckee restaurant hosting event about seafood sustainability

Dragonfly Restaurant and Sushi is hosting an event highlighting seafood sustainability on July 25.

The evening will begin with a free screening of the documentary “Red Gold” followed by an open discussion on what is “sustainable seafood”. For those interested in sampling Bristol Bay’s salmon, a salmon-centered dinner will follow the film and discussion.

“Red Gold” sheds light on the plight of Bristol Bay, which produces the world’s largest sockeye salmon fisheries and one of the largest king salmon runs. As wild salmon populations disappear around the world, Bristol Bay had been largely untouched by development but is now threatened by foreign mining corporations.

The film will begin at 6:15pm, with a half-hour discussion about the sustainability of seafood taking place immediately after. The discussion will be guided by Dragonfly’s chef and owner Billy McCullough as well as representatives from Trout Unlimited. The dinner, starting at 8pm, includes Bristol Bay salmon in three appetizers (cured, seared and in sushi), a cedar plank roasted sockeye salmon entrée, and mango-ginger lemongrass sorbet. Cost is $38.

For more information about the seafood sustainability event in Truckee, call (530) 587.0557. For more information about Bristol Bay, go online.

Massive margarita at California fair sets Guinness record

Entrepreneur Nick Nicora/Ovations Food Services set the Guinness World Record for the largest cocktail ever made – 10,500 gallons – set last year at Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville in Las Vegas. He made the "Calarita" at the California State Fair this month.

The name Calarita honors the California State Fair and the margarita. It will take a few weeks for Guinness to certify the record.

Nicora has 134,000 Calaritas to sell from the 30-foot-tall, custom-built chill tank, known as the World's Largest Cocktail Shaker, located on Palm Avenue between the Main Gate and the State Fair's landmark fountain.

Nicora super-sized the Hussongs recipe for the record-setting Calarita, and here it is:

2,100 gallons of Jose Cuervo tequila

4 gallons of Cointreau

2,800 gallons of Margarita mix

75 40-pound bags of ice

5,190 gallons of water

50 gallons of lime juice

Ovations' partners for the world record attempt were Brett Enright of Juicy's catering services, Jose Cuervo tequila and Joe Belli of Westec Tank and Equipment Co., which built the enormous Chardonnay tank outfitted with five chill sleeves and a spigot.

Is seasonal eating overrated?

By Katherine Wheelock, Food & Wine

For a couple of weeks last winter, I went on a kale-eating spree. I didn't do this on purpose, exactly. I was making my way through a list of newish New York restaurants I wanted to try, or to revisit because fall had surrendered to winter and I knew their menus would have changed. Most of these places had Dickensian names, names broken by ampersands, or names that sounded like old Vermont family farms. Many had menus freshly jotted on chalkboards, the provenance of the main ingredient in each dish noted. And every last one of them was serving a kale salad. Not long into my dining tour, right around the time I confronted a version with apple and dry Jack at a restaurant a block away from where I'd just had a version with apple and cheddar, I began to regard kale salad the way, as a kid, I viewed my mom's second flounder dinner in the same week: with resentment.

My spree came to an end at a perfectly lovely, smart young Italian restaurant in Brooklyn. It's not that I was looking forward to carciofi—I knew not to expect out-of-season artichokes at a place known for its market-driven menu. But I

didn’t expect to be offered a kale salad. I felt betrayed, sitting there on my stool clutching a season-befitting quince cocktail. I felt like a road warrior so disoriented by sameness, I didn’t know what hotel I was in anymore, never mind what city.

What followed my kale bender, as often does benders, was a mild depression. What’s wrong with me? I thought. Of all the things to complain about, I was criticizing chefs for systematically removing stringy asparagus from my winter plate and replacing it with the sweetest, tastiest, most environmentally beneficent produce around. The proliferation of seasonally driven menus, albeit a trend mostly still confined to a certain kind of restaurant in a certain kind of town, promised better dining experiences and a smaller culinary carbon footprint for America—a win-win. Come spring, I could count on more chefs than ever to rain morels, fiddleheads and ramps down on me. And I was dreading it.

“I came back from Rome in the spring of 2004 to a rampapalooza,” recalls journalist Frank Bruni, the former restaurant critic for the New York Times, reflecting on the early days of seasonal fever. “I remember thinking it was great that chefs were exalting the seasons, but also: Do I need to eat this many ramps?”

I remember those days, too. I was practically braiding ramps into headbands, reveling in Mario Batali’s embrace of spring produce, in Dan Barber’s more priestly devotion to seasonal ingredients, and in the way powerful tastemakers like these chefs were beginning to alter menus all over New York City. Ramp season—and rhubarb, asparagus and strawberry season—was like Christmas. But then Christmas started coming every day. And even more distressingly, seasonally driven menus began to feel less like a genuine celebration of good ingredients and more like some kind of manifesto. “Ramps speak to a lot of different restaurant vanities right now,” Bruni says. “They have become more of an ideological, moral statement than a

gustatory one.”

To be fair to ramps, they didn’t start this trend. The 21st-century seasonal-food movement began four decades ago, when Alice Waters founded Chez Panisse in Berkeley. She established the hallmarks of seasonal cooking: locally grown ingredients, simply prepared. These days, the “simply prepared” part is what many critics of slavishly seasonal menus lament. It’s not the zeal for seasonal produce that’s the problem, they say; it’s the lack of imagination that chefs bring to the task of cooking it.

Read the whole story

Study: Coffee during pregnancy not a bad choice

By Huffington Post

Pregnant women are typically told to avoid caffeine. One cup of coffee per day is okay, multiple studies have found, but generally it’s in the same category as cocktails and soft cheese – bad for baby’s development. However, researchers in Amsterdam recently concluded that there is no link between caffeine intake during pregnancy and a child’s behavior later in life; they say a cup of Joe might wire mom for the day, but it won’t cause her child to become hyperactive.

Participants in the study (3,400 mothers) were asked how much coffee they consumed during pregnancy. When their children turned 5 or 6, the same women filled out questionnaires about

their kids’ behavioral health -– teachers completed an identical survey. The authors concluded that mothers who drank caffeine during pregnancy did not put their kids at risk for “hyperactivity/inattention problems, emotional symptoms, conduct problems, peer relationship problems, overall problem behavior, or suboptimal prosocial behavior.”

Read the whole story