K’s Kitchen: Minnesota Wild Rice Soup

By Kathryn Reed

One of my favorite soups is my mom’s rice soup. I’ve just added another rice soup to my list of favorites.



The wild soup recipe below comes from my sister, Tami, in Minnesota. When I emailed to say how yummy it was she said she made it the night before as well and was excited to have it for lunch at school (she’s a teacher) that day. But she said it’s even better after being frozen and then reheated.

I can attest to the fact it is better the second day. So many dishes are that way. Time does wonders for allowing flavors to meld.

I was supposed to make this soup Christmas weekend for my mom and sister, Pam, but that didn’t happen. It got delayed a week – without them. Mom had brought the wild rice because she had some and didn’t think she would be using it anytime soon.

This means I don’t know how easy it is to find in Tahoe.

I have copied the recipe as it was published in the Ely (Minn.) Echo’s North Country Saver on Dec. 24, 2001. They printed it from “The Culinary Institute of America Book of Soups”.

The asterisks are from my sister.

I used a quart of cream because I knew I wouldn’t use the leftovers. And I used vegetable broth. I couldn’t find chives. And I used salted butter. If you do that, don’t add salt until the end – assuming you need any.

Minnesota Wild Rice Soup (makes 8 servings)

This rich soup, which is packed with vegetables, is an unusual way to enjoy wild rice. Wild rice contains a substance that produces a unique texture in this soup, not unlike a chowder. Incidentally, wild rice is not rice; it's actually a long-grain marsh grass native to the Great Lakes region of the Unites States. Many local Native Americans earn their living harvesting wild rice, which is why it's sometimes known as Indian rice. Clean wild rice before cooking by placing it in a bowl with plenty of cold water. Give the rice a stir, then set the bowl aside for a few minutes to let any debris float to the surface. Pour off the water and proceed with the recipe.

2 T unsalted butter

3 carrots, finely diced (about 1 cup)

2 leeks, white and light green parts, finely diced (abut 2½ cups)

2 celery stalks, finely diced (about 1 cup)

¼ C all-purpose flour*

2 quarts chicken broth*

¾ C wild rice

½ tsp salt, or to taste

¾ C heavy cream, hot*

3 T dry sherry*

¼ C minced chives

3 T chopped parsley

Heat the butter in a soup pot over medium heat. Add the carrots, leeks and celery. Cook until softened, about five

minutes.

Reduce the heat to low, add the flour and stir well. Cook gently, about three minutes, stirring constantly.

Add the broth gradually, whisking well with each addition to eliminate flour lumps. Bring to simmer.

Add the wild rice and salt. Continue to simmer until the rice is tender, but still somewhat chewy, about 45 minutes.

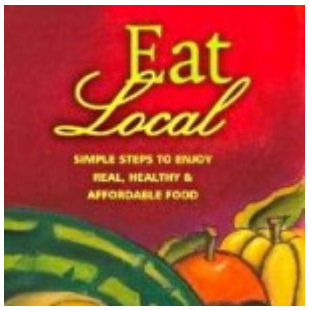
Stir in the heated cream and sherry. Season with salt. Serve in heated bowls, garnish with chives and parsley.

* Double the amount, according to my sister, Tami.

Book proves why eating locally makes a difference

By Kathryn Reed

“Voting with your fork” is a phrase author Jasia Steinmetz uses that resonated with me over and over again as I read “Eat Local: Simple Steps to Enjoy Real, Healthy & Affordable Food”.



How we spend money on food does make a difference in what stores carry and restaurants serve. We have a right to ask store managers and restaurant owners to stock and use local products. Not only do we have that right, some would argue it's an obligation.

In many ways this paperback is a resource guide to eating locally and healthfully. It's not necessarily something to read night after night – but instead in bits and pieces. The chapters are short. After all, there are 45 of them in 186 pages.

Those chapters are then divided into six sections: Introduction, Eat Local: Finding Local Food, Saving Money with Local Food, Eat Well, Join the Local Food Movement, and Appendices.

It's a great starting point for anyone looking to make a change in how they buy food or who wants to know reasons why they should. It also has good reminders for those already on the path to healthy eating.

It's about knowing where food comes from before it reaches the grocery store.

This book is all about why eating locally is important. And local comes with different definitions. It could be within 100 miles of where you live or your own state or country.

One of the main points is just getting people to be aware of where food is from. Then it explains how eating what is in season is how our ancestors did it for centuries, and how farmers' markets are an ideal place to learn about the seasons of food.

"Rather than consume food, we eat food products that may have come from a plant or animal at one time, but are barely

recognizable as anything from nature," Steinmetz writes.

Even though Steinmetz is a professor of food and nutrition at the University of Wisconsin, I did not feel lectured to. I liked the common sense approach to the book.

But some alarming facts were brought forward:

• "U.S. agriculture production is dominated by large farms, i.e., farms with gross sales of $250,000 or more. These farms contribute 80% of the value of production although smaller farms own 63% of the farmland."

• "One-third of the children born in 2000 are expected to develop diabetes in their lifetime."

• "Current food production accounts for 35% of the greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change."

• "We have lost 6,000 varieties of apples in the last century, largely because of narrow commercial production and retailing."

When the food isn't right on the night shift

By Nancy Shute, NPR

Working the night shift is bad for your health. But what if that's because the food is so lousy?

That’s the provocative question raised this week by the editors of PLoS Medicine, an online medical journal.

Scientists have been making the case that shift work increases a person’s risk of obesity, cancer, and sleep disorders. And then earlier this month, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health reported that nurses who worked the night shift were more likely to have Type 2 diabetes. Being overweight accounted for part of that, but normal-weight nurses also faced a greater risk of diabetes if they worked nights.

“Although some of the effects of shift work are probably unavoidable,” the journal editors wrote in this week’s editorial, “others, such as eating patterns, are obvious targets for intervention.” Translation: You can’t change the fact that night work messes with your body, but you can change what you put in your mouth.

The scientists who study the health effects of the graveyard shift haven’t yet chronicled what those people eat. And since about 15 million people work nights in the United States, it’s no small question.

But we can guess. Options for dining out at 3 a.m. pretty much begin and end at convenience stores and fast-food joints. Health-care workers, office cleaners, and others workers who don’t have time to leave the building are stuck with vending-machine food if they don’t bring something from home.

Read the whole story

Pesticide use in California on the increase

By Western Farm Press

Pesticide use in California rose in 2010 after declining for four consecutive years, according to data released by the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR). More than 173 million pounds of pesticides were reported applied statewide, an increase of nearly 15 million pounds – or 9.5 percent – from 2009.

The increase reflected a 15 percent jump in acres treated with pesticides – up 9.7 million acres to a total of 75 million acres in 2010. The Summary of Pesticide Use Report Data 2010 is online.

As in previous years, sulfur was the most highly used pesticide in both pounds applied and acres treated. By pounds, sulfur accounted for 27 percent of all reported pesticide use. Its use grew by 4.4 million pounds, or 10 percent, and 141,826 acres, or 9 percent.

Sulfur is a natural fungicide favored by both conventional and organic farmers mostly to control powdery mildew on grapes and processing tomatoes. Other pesticides with high use in 2010 treated a variety of diseases and pests that affected rice, walnuts, oranges, almonds, grapes and strawberries.

“The winter and spring of 2009 and 2010 were relatively cool and wet, which probably resulted in greater fungicide use to control mildew and other diseases,” DPR Chief Deputy Director Chris Reardon explained.

“Summer and fall temperatures were also below average, which led to late harvests, more insect damage to some crops and additional treatments.”

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: Cupcakes for adults

By Kathryn Reed

Eating a leftover cupcake from a 5-year-old’s birthday has made me want to keep her parents’ cookbook until I’ve made all of the recipes.



Having neither made cupcakes from scratch nor being proficient in the world of vegan baking, I asked Jen and Bob if I could have the recipe for the cupcakes she made for Scarlett. They said if I liked that one, I really ought to try the margarita ones.

Wow! I’m not sure if it’s all the lime or the tequila that’s in them that makes them so wonderful, but one really isn’t enough.

They are so yummy I’m bringing them to a New Year’s Eve party because a dessert is what we are supposed to bring.

Until last weekend, my experience with cupcake baking only involved a box. Now I’m embarrassed by that fact. Not only are these cupcakes scrumptious, but they are easy to make.

The recipe creators have such a great intro that all I can say is get baking.

The recipe comes from “Vegan Cupcakes Take Over the World” by Isa Chandra Moskowitz and Terry Hope Romero.

Mucho Margarita Cupcakes (makes 12)

These cupcakes have a lot going for them – lots of fresh lime juice, pretty green lime zest, and even a shot of tequila. But let's get serious … it's all about the margarita icing. The pale green frosting has a secret ingredient – kosher salt – that makes each bite sweet, tangy, and savory. If salt in a glaze sounds weird or you like your margaritas sans the salted rim, leave it out today, but make it with the salt for the margarita lover in your life tomorrow. The large crystal sugar that decorates the edges is worth finding; the crunch is a treat contrast to the cool, smooth icing.

¼ C freshly squeezed lime juice

1½ tsp finely grated lime zest

1 C soy milk or rice milk

¼ C canola oil

2 T tequila

½ tsp vanilla extract

¾ C granulated sugar

1 1/3 C all-purpose flour

¼ tsp baking soda

½ tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line muffin pan with cupcake liners.

In a large bowl beat together lime juice, zest, soy milk, canola oil, tequila, vanilla, and sugar. Sift in flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Mix until batter is smooth.

Fill liners three-quarters of the way full and bake 20 to 22 minutes until a toothpick or knife inserted through the center of one comes out clean. Transfer cupcakes to a cooling rack and let cool completely before frosting; allowing cupcakes to set for an hour or two helps the flavor to develop fully.

Margarita Icing

¼ C margarine, softened

1 T soy milk or rice milk

3 T lime juice

1 T tequila

Tiniest drop of green food color or food color paste you can manage, optional

2 C confectioners' sugar, sifted

Generous pinch or 1/8 teaspoon kosher or coarse salt, optional

Blend margarine with a fork until soft and fluffy, then stir in soy milk, lime juice, tequila, and food coloring if using (the effect is just to give the icing a very pale green tint, even lighter than mint green). Sift in 2 cups confectioners' sugar and blend until creamy and smooth. If it's a little too liquidy for your taste, sift in the remaining confectioners' sugar, one tablespoon at a time until a thick but spreadable consistency is reached. Refrigerate until ready to use.

Spread icing on cupcakes, spreading all the way to the edges, then roll just the outer edges of cupcakes in sugar crystals. If this is way too messy, just sprinkle sugar crystals on edges of cupcake by hand.

Grass Roots to expand product line at new location

By Kathryn Reed

Three-foot wide aisles with shelves packed from floor to ceiling are not the ideal shopping conditions – for consumer or storeowner.

That's why Jon McElroy is moving out of the location Grass Roots has been in since 1973 and moving across the driveway to the old Blockbuster building. With 1,200-square-feet of retail space today, when the new store opens in the spring it will have 4,000-square-feet devoted to natural foods.

"You will be able to see the products," McElroy said of the new site. "Now you can't stand back far enough to see what's on the bottom shelf. And if gets crowded, it is annoying."



Grass Roots will be moving almost next door in spring 2012. Photo/LTN

Through the years McElroy and wife Sandra have thought about

moving into a bigger place than their Dunlap Drive location in South Lake Tahoe, but the right place never came along.

Then earlier this year everything clicked. They bought the building that is next door, which also fronts Highway 50 at the Y. The Grass Roots sign is in place even though the moving date isn't likely to be until March.

"One reason we wanted to expand is there are a lot of new products, fun things (on the market). We go to trade shows and say we wish we could carry this and that, but where would we carry it?" McElroy said.

The McElroys look forward to being able to carry more products, expanding the produce section and creating a better shopping experience. He envisions it being a mini Whole Foods Market.

With the tight quarters of the current store, it's not possible to introduce a new product without taking one away.

Although the size of the store is much larger, with doubling the aisle space to 6 feet, much of the room will be used in cosmetic ways instead of devoted to sales. But at the same time, a more pleasant environment with more choices may keep the cash register ringing louder and more often.

Like most businesses, Grass Roots saw its bottom line take a hit in 2009 and 2010. McElroy said things have been on the upswing this year.

"People's shopping habits have changed. We have a sales flyer that comes out every month. They will look for specials and walk around with the flyer in hand," McElroy told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While people are price conscious, they are also turning their attention to better nutrition. This is one area where Grass Roots is attracting new customers – those who care about

what’s in a product and where their food comes from.

Lots of things need to be done to the building to convert it from a video store to a grocery store. Gone are the blue carpet and yellow walls. Wood will be on the walls and the floor will be stained concrete.

Today’s store has four little freezer doors. The new place will have 10.

Grass Roots is forming a partnership with Freshies for that South Tahoe restaurant to provide soup at the new location. It will be self-serve, with people able to get lunch on the go.

McElroy is talking to some people about turning the current Grass Roots spot into a café. The owner, who lives out of state, is likely to convert the upstairs back into apartments. Now it’s used as office space and storage.

The bakery, which McElroy knows well, will remain in the current location because the process to create a commercial kitchen is too involved. It means the fresh breads will be sold at the new property.

McElroy first went to work at Grass Roots as a baker in 1978 when Karen and Jeff Miner owned the natural foods store. The Miners had opened it five years earlier. McElroy bought them out in 1985 — the same year he got married. The McElroys have been operating it ever since then.

How much of organic food is really organic?

By Barry Estabrook, Atlantic

When is “USDA Organic” not organic? More often than you probably realize. The USDA keeps a “National List” of inorganic products that can legally go into foods labeled as organic. The casings for those tasty USDA Organic sausages can come from conventionally raised animals that have been fed antibiotics. The hops in your favorite organic beer can be sprayed with all manner of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Strawberries can be labeled as organic even if they had their start in a conventional nursery.

According to USDA rules, if 95 percent of a product is made up of organic ingredients, it can be called organic. If it’s 70 percent organic, the label can read “made with organic ingredients.”

For the past several years, public interest groups such as the Cornucopia Institute have complained that the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), which has the power to determine what materials can – and cannot – be used in organic production, too often weakens regulations in the face of intense lobbying by corporations who are more interested in the higher profits conferred by the word “organic” than in strong and meaningful standards.

Recently, five new members were nominated for five-year terms to the 15-member board. The Obama administration has had a schizophrenic relationship with agriculture, on one hand cozying up to the likes of Monsanto Co. by advocating for GM crops, and on the other hand winning plaudits from small farm and organic advocates for programs like Know Your Farmer Know your Food and the White House organic garden.

Read the whole story

Chef insists kitchen be stocked with locally grown products

By Kathryn Reed

Having the food source close by has always been important to chef-restaurant owner Mark Estee. Now it's even closer.

With the opening of Campo in Reno this fall, this is where he spends the bulk of his time.



Mark Estee

Estee made a name for himself when Moody's opened in Truckee nearly 10 years ago. That eatery has since been sold to the owner of the Truckee Hotel, and is undergoing a remodel and a bit of a menu change.

Then came Baxter's at the Village at Northstar in fall 2008. With Vail Resorts taking over operations of the ski resort and village, Estee walked away from that venture. The folks at Vail now run it.

(That’s too bad, because the experience at the restaurant last week left two *Lake Tahoe News* reporters wishing we’d eaten elsewhere. The food was average, the service so-so. But that was better than the service the family next to us got. Their server up and quit, kids didn’t get fed, and the adults took everyone elsewhere.)

While *Lake Tahoe News* has not been to Campo, Moody’s under Estee’s leadership was this reporter’s favorite restaurant in the greater Lake Tahoe area.

Estee’s philosophy toward food is to bring the freshest products – aka locally grown – to the tables of his restaurants. Being in Reno gets him even closer to growers.

“I’m active as I’ve ever been in the farming community,” Estee told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He is working with Great Basin Food Coop and is fighting to save Wolf Pack Meat. The latter, on the campus of UNR, is threatened with closure by the university. It is the only meat processing plant run by students.

“I think things are moving toward casual, more price friendly dining,” Estee said of how things have changed in the restaurant business through the years.

Campo is following that trend. And with the desire to use local ingredients, the menu is always changing. Estee also owns Burger Me!, which has locations in Truckee and Reno.

Estee’s prowess in the kitchen will be on show during the annual Chefs’ Holidays at the Ahwahnee in Yosemite. He will give demonstrations Jan. 11-12.

K’s Kitchen: Learning to cook with cranberry beans

By Kathryn Reed

I had never heard of a cranberry bean before. My mom and sisters said just treat them regular dried beans. And while that is what to do with them, it didn’t answer the question: What is a cranberry bean?



This is what I found on the Wise Geek website, “Cranberry beans may be known by several names. In Italy they are called borlotti, and New Englanders may refer to them as shell beans. Every now and again they pick up other names like French horticultural beans. These beans get their name from their varicolored appearance. They are usually white or cream in color with deep red or cranberry marks that are distributed in different patterns on the bean. In the U.S., cranberry beans are a fall crop.”

My sister Jann gave me a 2-pound bag of the beans while we were there for Thanksgiving. The Chico High School FFA as a fundraiser was selling them. They come from the Henshaw Farm, where the Future Farmers of America has a plot of land to use for educational purposes.

Zucchini and Vine in Chico sells the beans in the burlap bags for $5. The store is not keeping a dime – it all goes to the FFA students. To buy them, email zookeeny@gmail.com. Just a

warning, though, shipping may cost you more than the beans.

My sister also sent us home with four recipes that call for cranberry beans. To date, I've only tried the one below. I needed something to take to a gathering and thought the hummus would be a good choice.

I could not find sumac at Grass Roots or Safeway, so I didn't use it. I also used more garlic and lemon juice than what the recipe calls for. Part of the garlic I added came via garlic salt because I thought that's what it could use.

Just remember to soak the beans. I forgot to do that the next time I wanted to make the recipe and therefore was left scrambling to come up with an hors d'oeuvres that was not well thought out.

Cranberry Bean Hummus (makes about 2 cups)

4 ounces shelled fresh cranberry beans *

¼ onion, peeled

1 bay leaf

1 tsp kosher salt (divided)

1 large zucchini (about 9 ounces)

1 T (heaping) tahini

1 T extra virgin olive oil

Freshly ground black pepper

1 small clove garlic, chopped

½ tsp sumac (divided)

1 T freshly squeezed lemon juice

Place the cranberry beans, onion, bay leaf and ½ teaspoon salt

in a medium saucepan. Cover with water and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for about 20 minutes, or until the beans are tender; transfer to a bowl of ice water and set aside.

While the beans are cooking, slice the zucchini into long, fat strips. Heat a teaspoon of olive oil in a non-stick skillet over medium heat. Add the zucchini (in batches, if necessary) and sauté until tender and lightly brown. Set aside.

Transfer the cooled beans and zucchini to the bowl of a food processor. Add the tahini, 1 tablespoon olive oil, ½ teaspoon salt, freshly ground black pepper (to taste), garlic, ¼ teaspoon sumac and lemon juice. Blend until smooth. Check for seasoning and adjust as necessary.

Transfer to a serving bowl. Drizzle with a bit of olive oil and the remaining ¼ teaspoon of sumac. Serve with toasted pita bread triangles.

*Substitute dried beans by soaking beans overnight in large bowl covered with water.

California wine grape harvest 9% less than 2010

By Chris Macias, Sacramento Bee

After a second year of unseasonably cool temperatures, the grape tonnage has been tallied and the results are ready. According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, 3.3 million tons of wine grapes were harvested in

the 2011 growing season, a 9 percent drop from the previous year.

That’s not too much of a surprise considering the cold shoulder that Mother Nature gave to Northern California this year, with its wet spring and temperate summer. The grape harvest started about three weeks late in Lodi, with growers hoping for warm weather to help their grapes reach ripeness.

This year’s total pales compared with 2009, when 3.7 million tons of grapes were harvested – the second largest amount in California’s history. But as the saying goes, good things come in small packages.

Read the whole story