Classes will provide basics to grow veggies at home

The University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is offering eight new Grow Your Own! classes to help Nevadans who want to get on a path to more sustainable, local, healthy living by growing more of their own food.

Cooperative Extension offices in Carson City, Elko, Eureka, Fallon, Hawthorne, Lovelock, Owyhee, Pahrump, Reno, Tonopah, Winnemucca and Yerington will once again offer the April 3-May 22 series, providing gardeners and health buffs in the state with a back-to-the-basics guide to great harvests in Nevada. The workshops will be Wednesdays, 6–8pm.



Eight back-to-basics courses for great harvests are available in 12 Northern Nevada cities. Photo/Provided

April 3: Seeds vs. starts: planning and planting your garden

April 10: Insects and other garden pests

April 17: Efficient irrigation for the home vegetable garden

April 24: Gardening in Nevada’s soils: A hero’s journey

May 1: Nutrients and fertilizers for your vegetables

May 8: Edible herbs and flowers

May 15: Berries and brambles

May 22: Selecting fruit tree varieties.

Extension experts will touch on garden planning, controlling pests, best practices for growing herbs and vegetables, and the best fruit varieties for Nevada.

To register for any or all of the upcoming Grow Your Own! classes, contact Ashley Andrews at the Washoe County Cooperative Extension Office at (775) 784.4848. The class fee for Reno residents is $15 per class, or $60 for all eight classes. Class fees in other locations vary. Carson City, Elko, Eureka, Fallon, Hawthorne, Lovelock, Owyhee, Pahrump, Tonopah, Winnemucca and Yerington residents should contact their local Cooperative Extension office for information on attending the series in those locations.

Tahoe City Wine Walk tickets on sale

The 8th annual Tahoe City Wine Walk returns June 22. More than 800 people could visit 30 regional wineries last year.

This summer’s alfresco event, scheduled from noon to 4pm, will again focus on varietals from regional California wine producers and will also feature gourmet bites from North Lake Tahoe’s top restaurants and catering companies.

The Tahoe City Wine Walk runs along scenic North Lake Tahoe Boulevard and provides some of the best views of Lake Tahoe.



A couple enjoys the 2012 Tahoe City Wine Walk. Photo/Provided

Tickets are on sale and run $35/person in advance and $45/person at the event (cash only). Ticket price includes admittance, wine tasting, commemorative wine glass, bite-sized offerings, live music and free on-site parking. Attendees must be 21 years or older and show valid ID when purchasing tickets and registering the day of the event.

The Tahoe City Wine Walk is a fundraiser for the Tahoe City Downtown Association. This nonprofit organization consists of local merchants, property owners, community associations, residents, professionals and contributors whose goal it is to enhance and promote a vibrant and prosperous commercial and social center for the residents and visitors to Tahoe City.

For more information and to purchase tickets online, click to the official website.

Sierra salsa winners not divulging ingredients

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Sierra's Salsa Showdown is shrouded in secrecy. The winners are not revealing their recipes. And the judges need more to eat than just a tiny tasting cup in order to dissect the edibles.



Lara Weiss of Incline made the best fruit salsa in the March 24 competition at Sierra. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"I can't share all the secret ingredients," Lara Weiss of Incline Village told *Lake Tahoe News* on Sunday after winning the fruit contest.

She is no rookie to this sixth annual competition. Three years ago she also won. Her efforts earned her a season pass to Sierra-at-Tahoe for 2013-14.

Weiss did reveal that grilled pineapple, mango, habaneros and jalapeños go into her award-winning salsa.

Judges in both categories rated each salsa from 1 – being weak to 5 – being bomb-diggity! Each was judged on appearance-color, aroma, flavor-taste, spice blend, originality and overall impression.

Marking the judge's sheet on March 24 were this reporter, Mike from Lake Tahoe TV, Dennis the lift operations supervisor, Munchie who is the on mountain food and beverage manager, Jeff who supervises security (and is a past salsa winner), and Evan the risk manager.

I gave Weiss the most number of points out of any contestant for her Fire Fruit Fusion. I kept wanting more. From the start it was great – the aroma, look and then that kick of spice at the end blended perfectly with the fruits.

Kopa's Fruit Salad, which came in second on my scorecard and with all the judges, was named after Sierra's avalanche dog. It's hard to know if that may have won over some of the Sierra judges.



It was a tough day of work for the judges of the Sierra Salsa Showdown. Photo/Susan Wood

The concoction was definitely the prettiest of all submitted. The strawberries added a great sweetness. Another nice thing about this fruit salsa is that is had no spice – just fruit to make it so yummy.

I was not in sync with my fellow judges when it came to the traditional category.

The Gringo came in third, but was first with my taste buds. The smoky aroma was unique and the avocado brought balance.

The judges, though, awarded the season pass to No BPA made by Allen Evangelista of Antioch. This was the first time he has competed in this contest.

“It’s all fresh ingredients … cilantro, onions, tomatoes, garlic,” he said. The recipe is his mother-in-law’s and because Evangelista wants to stay on her good side, he’s not giving out any more details.

This was my No. 3 pick in this category.

Later there was a taco eating contest. Aaron Hughes of Manteca won a Burton Bud Light snowboard for being the fastest to finish the five spicy tacos.

A couple contestants walked away from the table shaking their heads about how spicy the tacos were. Hughes was just all smiles and didn’t care that sauce covered his cheeks.

Unusual veggies find a home in French Laundry’s organic garden

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

While visiting France, restaurateur Thomas Keller nibbled a crunchy blue-leafed spinach that he’d never seen before. It

tasted faintly like oysters – and Keller immediately texted his staff.

The French Laundry's garden got another addition.



Adam Keefer shows off baby carrots. Photo/Debbie Arrington/Sacramento Bee

"It took us a little while to track down the seed, but we got it," said chef-turned-garden manager Adam Keefer, who oversees the French Laundry's large organic garden. "It's actually a succulent and only grows on the moors of Scotland."

Now, the appropriately named oyster-leaf spinach is occasionally part of the menu at the famed Yountville restaurant, known for its nine-course meals with no repeats among the named ingredients. It's usually used to complement oysters or other seafood, accenting its own unusual flavor.

"It has a delicate blue flower in late summer," Keefer noted. "It's actually become one of my favorites."

It's just one of more than 300 varieties of vegetables, herbs, berries and edible flowers grown for Napa's farm-to-fork landmark. With chefs just steps away, it's the ultimate kitchen garden.

"How many people get to grow vegetables in a location like this?" said Keefer as he marveled at the Napa view.

With deep farming roots, Keefer came to the French Laundry to cook, but transitioned outdoors about four years ago.

“I started working out in the garden and just loved it,” he said. “My grandfather had a berry farm, so it’s in my genes. Gardening and culinary (work) are both part of the same genre; it’s the flip side of food.”

Located on 3 1/2 acres on Washington Street, the garden is open daily to the public. It supplies about 40 percent of all produce used by Keller’s three Yountville restaurants: French Laundry, Bouchon and Ad Hoc.

“People ask us if they can buy some, but we use it all up,” Keefer said. “If we tried to grow everything we used, we’d need all 3 acres just for onions.”

Instead, Keefer concentrates on unique taste sensations – such as the oyster-leaf spinach – or vegetables that lose flavor rapidly after harvest.

“Taste this arugula,” he instructed after sampling some himself. “It’s got this wonderful peppery bite you only get with fresh-picked. That totally disappears after only a few hours. Tomorrow, that bite is gone. But there are lots of other examples. Celery tastes different straight out of the ground.”

The manicured garden’s wide grass paths between the vegetable beds accommodate restaurant patrons who wander over.

“We’re educational as well (as producing food),” Keefer said. “People come for dinner, then come back in the morning to the garden to see what they ate.”

Also getting an education are chefs.

“They learn seasonality,” Keefer said. “Chefs are always planning for the next hour, the next service, the next day. In the garden, you plan months ahead. A big part of what we do in

the garden is teach chefs. They harvest with us, so they can truly appreciate what it takes to grow this food. It’s not just a commodity; it’s back-breaking hard work.”

Among the unusual vegetables growing this spring is cardoon, an artichoke cousin valued as a harbinger of spring. Celtuce, also known as stemmed Chinese lettuce, is just reaching its peak. A vast swath of fava beans replenishes the soil as well as flavors recipes.

White strawberries, which will ripen by summer, attract bees from nearby hives. A large bed of golden, black and red raspberries, brought by Keefer from his own garden, begins to bud out.

Twenty varieties of gourmet leaf lettuces and microgreens are trimmed by hand from raised beds.

“I love a new one, Salanova,” Keefer said. “It’s a beautiful lettuce, like a chrysanthemum. It’s a stunning look.”

White Satin carrots, which look like edible icicles, mix with familiar baby Nantes and Chantenay. Cherry Belle radishes grow near heirloom baby beets and Tokyo turnips.

“In the summer, we’ve got 14-foot-tall sunchokes,” Keefer said. “The tomatoes are in 6-foot cages. You can’t see across the garden; everything is so big and lush.”

A movable enclosure allows the French Laundry’s flock of little bantam hens to feast at different locations. The chickens produce small but flavorful eggs that are served at the French Laundry.

Inside the hoop house, seedlings await transplanting. This summer, Keefer will grow 46 varieties of tomatoes, 20 different peppers and 10 kinds of eggplant.

“I’m really excited about the Shisito peppers; they’re the new hot thing,” Keefer said. “They’re similar to Padron.”

As for tomatoes, Keefer prefers Brandywine and Amish Paste as his personal favorites. He knows his chefs will want something different.

“Chefs are funny,” he said. “They’ll get really excited about something new, but after five days of cooking with it, they’ll want something else.”

Tomato producers use grafting for higher yields

By Chuck Raasch, USA Today

Tomatoes, the kings of U.S. home gardens, are undergoing a revolutionary change, according to breeders and growers.

Producers are grafting disease-resistant and insect-resistant roots onto familiar heirloom and hybrids, and seed catalogs are featuring a varied selection of grafted plants for the first time this year. Tests in the U.S. have shown that even notoriously stingy but good-tasting tomato plants become super producers when grafted to more vigorous roots.

“It is the biggest thing to happen in gardening, probably in 20 years,” says John Bagnasco, host of “Garden Life” radio show and president of the Vista-based GardenLife, which sells the grafted “Mighty Matos” on its website.

He is in a partnership – called SuperNaturals – that sells through several popular seed catalogs and hopes to triple sales over last year, to more than 1 million plants sold in the U.S. this year.

Andrew Mefferd goes further. A self-described “talent scout

for plants” and the technician in charge of tomatoes at Johnny’s Selected Seeds, a global supplier based in Winslow, Maine, Mefferd calls grafting “the single biggest thing to advance tomatoes, I would say, since tomatoes were first hybridized” over a century ago.

The grafting push comes at an intersection of economic, environmental and health trends. Some home-garden wholesalers and retailers have had robust years during the economic downturn because more people are growing their food to take pressure off household budgets. Meanwhile, health-conscious consumers are seeking more naturally homegrown products, but have limited garden space.

The National Gardening Association’s annual survey found that while overall gardening activity, which includes everything from landscaping to potted plants, fell from $36 billion in 2008 to $29 billion in each of the last three years, vegetable gardening sales were up by roughly 20 percent to about $1.7 billion annually.

“It’s really an economic and an environmental story,” says Alice Doyle, a grafting pioneer in the U.S. and co-owner of the wholesaler Log House Plants in Cottage Grove, Ore. “There is a triple bottom-line profit – more yield, less expensive chemical usage, no environmentally negative outputs.”

Grafting involves attaching the top of a popular plant onto a root that has demonstrated resistance to the diseases and microscopic pests, called nematodes, that have killed many a home-grown tomato.

Some home gardeners have reported double or triple yields from grafted tomatoes that bear longer and in greater volumes than normal heirlooms or hybrids. Vines can shoot a dozen feet or more. Because grafting is labor-intensive and requires special growing conditions, grafts are pricey, going for $7.95 or more a plant, twice the price of normal plants. They are also fussy

growers and must be carefully planted.

But producers are hoping to demonstrate that the extra cost and work is worth it to farmers market producers, outdoor tomato farmers and urban gardeners. Besides tomatoes, grafted eggplants and peppers are showing up in this year's seed catalogs.

Grafting vegetables has been common for decades in countries where land is scarce and where soils have become disease-laden over centuries of farming. Commercial growers have grown them for years in this country, but this is the "roll-out year" nationally in the home-garden market, says says Mary-Kate Mackey, who writes a garden blog.

Doyle was introduced to grafted plants during a trip to Crete in 2000, and she began working on getting them more widely used in the U.S. Bagnasco had been working separately on the same idea, and the two ran into one another at a gardening symposium in Dallas a few years ago.

They formed SuperNaturals with Tim Wada, president of the Vista, Calif.-based Plug Connections, which grafts most of the tomatoes sold under the Mighty Matos label.

Dick Zondag, the president of Wisconsin-based J.W. Jung Seed Company, says his company tested the grafted tomatoes last year and decided to feature them this year.

"That was my first question, 'why would you even consider paying seven or eight dollars for a tomato plant when you can plant a seed that costs 10 or 15 cents?'" Zondag says. "The reason you do it is because the yield is sometimes three to four times as much. The fruit comes earlier. … Some of these really tasty heirloom varieties can really take off."

Heirlooms are often the tastiest tomatoes, but can be prone to disease and meager producers. Hybrids can boost production, but often sacrifice taste. Grafting is a detour around both

challenges.

Nature “never gives it all” in the quest to boost production, Mackey says. “It holds back something, and the first thing it often holds back is taste.”

But with grafting, she says, “you get yield, you get taste, and you get disease resistance.”

Harry Olson, 69, a retiree from Salem, Ore., last year conducted a grafted vs. non-grafted test on five tomato varieties in his community garden. All five grafts produced more, and he says his grafted Brandywines had three times the yield of their nongrafted step-cousins.

The self-described “Doubting Thomas” says he saw a “profound difference” resulting in plants that produced weeks after normal plants and from root systems that were 10 times larger than non-grafted ones.

“People would just stand there and look” at his prolific plants, he says.

Jim Myers, an Oregon State University horticulture professor who specializes in developing plants that can thrive in the Pacific Northwest, created a purple tomato high in anti-oxidants called the Indigo. Last year, he and graduate assistants tested grafted vs. non-grafted Indigos, and the grafted plants produced three times more.

Grafting “could make heirlooms very productive,” he says. He predicts that the price will come down as demand grows, as producers seek more rootstock, and if grafting becomes more mechanized.

Fresh eggs become couple's calling

By Dan McGee, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

A dachshund got Paul and Joy Schouweiler of Hadji Paul's Chicken and Feed into the chicken business.

Paul Schouweiler's wife, Joy Schouweiler, who breeds dachshunds, planned to trade a puppy for chickens in late 2007. Thinking she would get 40 chickens in exchange for the puppy, she got 100.

"I thought, 'What am I going to do with all these eggs?' So I went and got certified to sell them to the Great Basin Community Food Co-Op."



Paul and Joy Schouweiler

Soon afterward, her husband headed to Iraq as a military contractor. Back on the small family farm in Palomino Valley north of Spanish Springs, Joy Schouweiler accumulated chickens.

Says Paul Schouweiler, "Over the next two years we got about 300 more chickens. When I came back in 2010 that's when we had 700 chickens, became an LLC and got a business license."

Choosing a name – odd as Hadji Paul's Chicken and Feed sounds

– was easy.

While he was in Iraq, Schouweiler was nicknamed “hadji,” an Arabic sign of respect for anyone older than 50. He kept the honorific when he came home.

As egg sales grew, businesses sought them out.

“Actually, Whole Foods came to us wanting to get more local people into their store,” Schouweiler says. “They came out to the farm, checked everything as they want to make sure you’re legitimate, how you’re treating your animals.”

Demand spurred by word-of-mouth kept growing as they participated in several farmer’s markets. They use their website, as well a Facebook presence, to keep consumers informed where they’ll be selling eggs.

They also have several commercial customers such as Campo, which orders 100 dozen eggs a week, and the 4th Street Bistro, which uses four dozen a week. The list also includes Homage Bakery, Buenos Grill and Pathways at UNR.

In the winter, when hens lay fewer eggs, the Schouweilers restrict orders for retail customers so they can fill their commercial orders.

A larger flock will compensate.

“We could sell three times as many,” Schouweiler says. “Right now we are trying to expand the business to bring our chickens to over 2,000 laying hens.”

All the hens, who have a prime egg-production span of two years, live in predator-proof coops – allowing them room to run – with a shelter that keeps them out of the elements.

“The biggest challenge is the cost of the feed. As everything goes up, you’re trying to keep your price at a competitive level and reasonable for our customers that have been with us

for years. That’s kind of tough,” Schouweiler says. “Since we started doing this the feed has gone up 100 percent in five years.”

The rising demand for organic eggs, meanwhile, requires a special and costly feed.

Chickens eat about anything, and the Schouweilers have plans to build a greenhouse for vegetables to help feed the flock. Three restaurants in the area also have show interest in purchasing vegetables produced from the greenhouse.

The couple is working with the Nevada Small Business Development Center at UNR to develop plans for expansion – and plans to ensure the business survives after they retire.

“We’re already hadjis,” says Joy Schouweiler with a laugh.

Diminished paychecks equal fewer nights eating out

By Caroline Fairchild, Huffington Post

Far fewer Americans dined out last month as many adjusted to smaller paychecks, according to new data released from a closely watched index of restaurant sales.

Sales at casual-dining restaurants fell 5.4 percent in February, according to this month’s Knapp-Track Index, which records monthly sales at casual dining restaurants like Applebee’s and Red Lobster. The big drop far exceeded a 0.6 percent month-over-month decline in January.

The decrease shows that many Americans are dealing with the

new reality of a 2 percent pay cut Congress passed in January when it declined to extend the 2010 payroll tax holiday. The move affected roughly 160 million Americans. Workers earning $50,000 a year, for example, started taking home $80 less a month.

“A lot of people had feelings of betrayal on taxes,” Malcolm Knapp, the consultant who created the Knapp-Track Index, told The Huffington Post. “By Jan. 15, when everyone looked at their paycheck and it was smaller … it felt like someone stole their money. And this happened all over the country.”

The hit in sales will affect the industry largely responsible for roughly three-fifths of new jobs created after the recession. Food services, retail, and employment services account for 43 percent of low-wage jobs created during the recovery, according to a recent study by the National Employment Law Project.

Knapp, who has been analyzing the restaurant industry since 1970, said fast food restaurants like McDonald’s and Taco Bell have also seen declining sales. An increase in gas prices and bad weather also contributed to February’s dip in restaurant sales, he added.

Although American diners eating more meals at home may have a negative impact on the economy in the near-term, Paco Underhill, founder of New York-based consumer-behavior research and consulting firm Envirosell, said that the trend could be a positive indication of growth in the long-term. Americans may be increasing their confidence to invest in larger purchases like houses and cars, he said.

“Casual dining is about near-term, inexpensive indulgences,” Underhill told HuffPost. “As the recession winds down, there is pent-up demand for more expensive durable goods – be that cars, computers, or whatnot. As they manage their pocketbook, they have to cut back on where they are spending on a day-to-

day basis.”

Recent reports of increased consumer confidence may also indicate that the money diners previously were spending at casual dining restaurants may be going toward other purchases. In March, the Bloomberg Consumer Comfort Index, which tracks personal finance confidence, increased to its highest level since April, linked to an improving job market and a decline in Americans seeking unemployment benefits.

Sierra’s salsa judges ready for grand tasting



Do you make best Sierra salsa? Photo/LTN file

Sierra’s Salsa Showdown is Sunday starting about noon at West Bowl.

There are two categories – Traditional and Fruity – with a maximum of 30 salsas between the two.

Lake Tahoe News Publisher Kathryn Reed is one of the judges. Tip: she likes spicy salsas.

Deliver at least 2 cups of homemade salsa to the Baja Grill between 8:30-10am on March 24.

A winner from each category will receive a 2013-14 Unlimited Season Pass, which is now good at 10 mountains across the West. And the winning salsa maker must be present to win.

Lamb becoming popular with locavores

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

It’s lean, local and literally a different animal. Today’s lamb has become the locavore’s sustainable meat of choice, grass-fed and sourced from family farms.

“It’s quintessentially celebratory,” said butcher Ryan Harris of Napa’s The Fatted Calf. “It has so much flavor. If you get lamb from the right place, there’s nothing like it.”



Lamb is a popular Easter meal. Photo/LTN

And California is lamb central, producing more of this flavorful meat than any other state. That’s good news this spring holiday season, when lamb is a traditional favorite for Easter and Passover.

“Lamb sales always spike in spring, at least double the rest of the year,” said Megan Wortman, executive director of the American Lamb Board.

Local lamb is now available year-round, particularly in California. More than 4,000 farmers raised about 600,000 sheep and lambs in 2012. Births are timed to keep a steady supply.

“Just five or six years ago, you could not find lamb consistently at the grocery store,” Wortman said.

Overall, U.S. lamb consumption remained flat through the recession, averaging less than one pound per person a year. By comparison, Americans eat about 270 pounds of beef a year. In recent years, chefs and consumers have switched from imported New Zealand lamb to local sources. American lamb now accounts for about half of total U.S. sales.

“That’s really exciting for us,” Wortman said. “The meat hasn’t traveled 10,000 miles. In Northern California, local lamb is everywhere.”

Almost a century after the U.S. government waged an “Eat No Lamb” campaign to increase wool production, lamb still battles bad perception.

One issue was taste. Today’s lamb tastes better. As demand for wool went down, many ranchers switched to meat breeds with milder flavor.

Overcooked, any lamb can be tough or stringy. Its outside layer of hard fat burns at a lower temperature than beef and can smell gamey. Lamb from older animals can taste gamey, too.

“Someone can have one bad experience and never come back,”

Wortman said. “That’s why we recommend to always cook lamb medium-rare. Pull it from the oven at 135 degrees and let it rest 10 minutes. It will be perfect every time.”

Another issue: price.

“People think it’s expensive; rack of lamb (the prime rib of lamb) is the highest-priced menu item,” Wortman said. “But there are many other flavorful cuts.”

For example, Harris loves lamb neck. “It has a lot of meat, bone and fat, which means a lot of flavor. It’s a braising cut and really good.”

The Fatted Calf sells McCormack Ranch lamb raised in Rio Vista. “It’s always in high demand,” Harris said. “It’s really phenomenal lamb.”

Karin and Keith Sinclair are among those local lamb farmers who sell directly to the public. At their Penryn ranch, the Sinclairs started raising sheep in 1998 when their daughter Kristina turned 9 and joined 4-H; a ewe was her first project.

Now, the Sinclairs have about 100 ewes, 130 lambs and counting. They raise Dorset, Hampshire and Cheviot sheep among other breeds.

“In California, we have mild weather and good grasses,” said Karin Sinclair, president of the Gold Country Sheep Producers Association. “That means very mild-flavored lamb.”

Sinclair enjoys the less expensive cuts such as kebabs, shanks and sirloin roasts.

“I think a lot of people are intimidated by lamb,” she said. “They think it’s pricey and needs expensive seasoning. I marinate (roast or kebabs) in apple juice, rosemary and garlic overnight in a Ziplock bag. It’s awesome on the grill. Really, nothing is simpler.”

Lamb 101

Nutrition: Lamb is very similar to lean beef in its profile – often with fewer calories. Grass-fed lamb tends to have less fat than its grain-fed meat counterparts such as beef or pork.

The leanest lamb cuts are leg, sirloin and shank, with 2 to 3 grams of saturated fat per 3-ounce serving. Containing the same protein as beef (23 grams), 3 ounces of lamb averages 160 calories, almost 30 less than 90 percent lean hamburger. But a quarter-pound ground lamb patty has about 20 calories more than its beef counterpart.

Besides protein, lamb also is a good source of vitamin B12, niacin, selenium (an antioxidant) and zinc.

Selection: Lamb has less marbling than beef, which makes for lean meat. A 6-pound leg (which is always a back leg with some sirloin attached) will serve 6 to 8 people.

Shoulder cuts – such as arm or blade chops or shoulder roasts – are the No. 1 retail cuts, according to the American Lamb Board. Shanks come from front legs.

Rack of lamb – the tenderest and most expensive cut – is the prime rib of lamb. One rack contains seven to eight ribs. "Frenching" means the meat on the rack was trimmed back to expose the rib bones. A crown roast is two racks, trimmed and tied together.

Younger lamb has milder flavor. Look for fresh pink or cherry red; it denotes a younger animal (under 1 year old). Baby lamb looks pale pink, like veal. Dark purplish red meat usually means the lamb was closer to 1 year when it went to market. By USDA regulation, lamb must be younger than 1 year.

Storage: Cook or freeze ground lamb or smaller cuts within three days of purchase; roasts will keep up to five days. To freeze, wrap tightly in plastic wrap. Use within three months

for ground lamb, six months for other cuts. Cooked meat will keep three days in the refrigerator.

Always defrost lamb in the refrigerator and not at room temperature. It keeps the moisture in the meat.

Preparation: Use lamb like beef – roast, grill, fry, braise. Because of its lower fat content, lamb tends to cook more quickly than beef. Be careful not to overcook; past medium, lamb gets tough. Keep it pink.

For roasts or leg of lamb, roast at 325 degrees until the meat reaches an internal temperature of 135 degrees. That's about 15-20 minutes a pound for bone-in roasts; 20-25 minutes a pound for boneless. Remove from oven and let rest 10 minutes. The internal temperature will reach 145 degrees.

A burger isn't just a burger

By Susan Wood

BEAVER CREEK – One of the most traditional foods at a ski area may be the most memorable when it breaks tradition.

Much of the hamburger's success is contingent on a number of factors ranging from the ingredients to the side dishes and even the value of the meal.

Take a recent Beaver Creek Food + Wine Festival après ski party, where celebrity chefs lined up their concoctions on the patio of the Park Hyatt. While the perfect complement – beer,

was flowing from Stella and Leffe Belgium taps, Texas grill master Tim Love and BRAVO's Top Chef Spike Mendelsohn wowed hundreds of hungry party attendees with their versions of the ultimate American staple that dates back thousands of years to the ancient Egyptians.



Burgers are anything but ordinary at the Beaver Creek Food + Wine event. Photos/Kathryn Reed

So what are their secrets?

"There are no secrets except good meat and good salt," Love said. "And you can't beat a good bacon cheeseburger."

He made the simple ensemble on the grill, a place this immensely confident chef is very comfortable. Even his three adolescent children have become grill masters.

After sampling an assortment at the après ski party and other Tahoe ski resort burgers, I couldn't have agreed more with Love's assessment. I do like something I can't get everywhere.

His special sauce, tomato and roasted red pepper didn't overpower the meat.

Love seemed to relish the heated challenge. He and Mendelsohn are quite comfortable in the spotlight, even when they're under fire.

For Love, it was the Food Network challenge in which he was criticized by the judges for “just making a salad” with kale as an ingredient, then turning around and using it again. He brushed off the criticism and told *Lake Tahoe News* he was “happy to be beating” other cooks in Iron Chef challenges.

For Mendelsohn, his brush with another panel of judges came when he plated his dishes with another chef, “his bro.” He was eliminated on that round, but he also told *LTN* he was proud of what he served and thought the maneuver was legal.

Television competitions aside, the two top chefs ran a no-holds-barred contest of their best burgers and the partygoers were more than happy to take part.

“When he cooks, he absolutely has it down. And it doesn’t hurt that he’s cute,” said Stephanie Eubanks of Orange, as her husband stood close by. Eubanks attended the Food + Wine magazine event the previous year as well.

They weren’t the only ones thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Even the après ski party Brendan McKinney band appreciated the crowd’s enthusiasm, and the foursome was more than happy to stay longer than scheduled.

Suzie Reid and Holly Douple of Centerville, Ohio, try to make it to the event every year.

As she roamed between the beer taps and the grills, Douple said she likes to follow Love because “he’s got attitude,” and it comes across in his dishes.

“We stalk the chefs at the ‘meet and greet’,” Reid said, giggling.

Celebrity chefs have become the new sex symbol. They may have found another way to a woman’s heart.

Dressed in blue jeans and a hoodie, Mendelsohn added a little

flirtation to the diners sampling his wild boar burgers. The small burgers were topped with smoked cheddar, barbecue sauce, pickles and chipotle because the rebel chef “likes heat.”

As it turned out, these celeb chefs weren’t the only ones dishing up their competitive best.

Beaver Creek Chophouse Executive Chef Jay McCarthy put on his creative hat for a grilled ensemble worth returning for more. He combined pickled red onions, rosemary, pesto and roasted garlic for a magnificent explosion of flavor on his lamb sliders. Grab the French fries in the cones, and it’s burger heaven.

McCarthy appeared competitive and cooperative.

As a host chef to the visiting celebs, he noted how enjoyable it was to share the stage and limelight. He and Mendelsohn chatted at length at the festival’s “meet and greet” event and insisted “you’ll like the buns I brought out.”

He did let *Lake Tahoe News* in on a little secret of the perfect bun.

“There’s a little extra sugar in them, so they melt in your mouth,” he said.

Sometimes sharing is the name of the game.

“This whole event is fun. We’re a small town, and we all know each other,” Black Diamond Bistro head chef Andy Buechl said of his fellow restaurateur chefs at the “meet and greet.”

Park Hyatt sous chef Nathan Trap agreed on the opinion of the event involving six local restaurants. Normally, the competition is high in a tourist-rich environment.

“It’s fun to work with all the chefs. We’ve been sharing the kitchen and agreeing on what to serve,” Trapp said, as servers ran in and out of the busy kitchen.

Perhaps, Lake Tahoe ski resorts could follow the example – especially since three of the mountains are owned by the same company, Vail Resorts.

Tasting Tahoe burgers

In this season's burger sampling, it was the independent Sierra-at-Tahoe smokehouse burger that tantalized my taste buds and wallet the most.

• Sierra's 360 Smokehouse at the Grand View grill at the resort's summit serves up a burger as superior as the view. The bacon burger, which was remarkably seared on the edges from the smoker, is scrumptious, spicy and tangy. And for $14.99, it comes with a choice of side dish. I chose the sweet potato fries because they're always fantastic at Sierra. To think I couldn't even finish the two dishes and really wanted to.

• For those really watching a budget, the family-friendly Aspen Lounge at Sierra's base lodge provides a burger bar where the diner chooses the assortment to put on a $7 cheeseburger. French fries are a mere $3. Vegetarians may opt for a grilled cheese for $5. The bread is made locally. The burger fixings are vast, including: lettuce, grated cheese, peppers, tomatoes, onions and various sauces such as teriyaki, barbecue, mustard, ketchup and mayonnaise. One can also add grilled mushrooms, onions and even bacon for $1. The place is an ideal inexpensive option. And, I love the toasted bun around the half-pound burger.

• For a really big burger, Vail introduced the Epic burger at its fleet of resorts a few years ago. At Lake Tahoe, a hungry diner may order it at Kirkwood, Northstar and Heavenly. I chose the latter at the top of the tram restaurant. The double patty priced at $12.95 offers a diner a full meal, but at least mine was a little on the messy side. Of course, judging from Carl's Junior burger joint commercials – some may prefer

that. Along those lines, the Epic burger sounds like a Big Mac in terms of ingredients except for the bread – two all-beef patties, special (Thousand Island) sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a (special) bun.

• I actually enjoyed the Zephyr burger more at Northstar's new mid-mountain Zephyr Lodge. It wasn't wet, so the bun wasn't soggy. The pepper jack cheese, along with the certified Angus beef that Vail uses, represents a great combo. The aioli adds to the flavor-filled burger, and the onion brings out a welcome crunch on every bite.

• In the category of "it's all about the meat," I thoroughly relished Sugar Bowl's $11 cheeseburger made with Painted Hills beef at the Belt Room Bar. The meat's name comes from ranching families in Wheeler County, Ore., who agreed to take the initiative to produce better quality beef. There are no added hormones, antibiotics, and the cows are pasture-raised on a vegetarian diet. This care reflects in the taste of the burger, which I completely finished. I received a generous portion of French fries with it and garnished the burger with Swiss cheese, tomato, lettuce and a dash of ketchup. The perfect complement was Sugar Bowl's Pale Ale, which the waitress declared is "popular." I could see why. (Note: she didn't however know what the significance of the Painted Hills meat was.) Ignorance aside, the Belt Room Bar provides an ideal atmosphere for those wanting to sit inside or out of the village main lodge. Warm and satisfied, I almost fell asleep in the sun.

• Kirkwood provides a good version of its outside-grilled burger at the backside of the ski resort. The Out Mountain cheeseburger at the snack shop cabin near the Sunrise chairlift runs $10.25 and comes with accessories the diner may add on. I opted for my mainstay tomato and lettuce and threw on barbecue sauce for good measure. The toasted bun is definitely a nice touch but the burger was a tad overdone.

A burger’s past

• 1209: Mongolian Emperor Genghis Khan dined on ground meat when his cavalry traveled.

• 1600s: Ships from the German port of Hamburg began returning with Russian steak tartar.

• 1802: The Oxford English dictionary defined hamburg steak as salt beef.

• 1900: Louis Lassen of Louis Lunch in New Haven, Conn., laid claim to the invention of the hamburger when he ground up lean beef, broiled it and served it between toast.

• 1921: Real estate insurance agent Edgar Waldo “Billy” Ingram teams up with cook Walter Anderson to open the first White Castle hamburger stand in Wichita, Kan. The small burgers were served off the grill with a lot of onion and soft yeast buns. They sold for 5 cents each

• Today, millions of restaurants, burger joints and fast-food stands provide the hand-to-mouth dish.

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