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KALE

ONIONS

CELERIAC

BEETS

CARROTS

From The Garden To The Table

SEASONAL VEGETABLE FARE
From Garden to Table

By Louise Frazier

In the early 1980's we opened a vegetarian restaurant in Cologne, Germany with a menu based on produce from local and regional Biodynamic and organic farms. We were five entrepreneurs—4 Germans and 1 American—with varying degrees of cooking experience and professional backgrounds that ranged from engineer to home economics teacher. Not only was our organizational structure unusual (only Konrad Adenaeur's grandson understood our concepts and developed the legal entity), but also all our funds came from private sources while the Bank of Bochum sent a chef trained at the Anthroposophic Nutrition Research Center to teach us the art of whole grain cookery, which was then being revived from earlier traditions.

In addition we learned a great deal from visiting and talking with the growers who would be supplying our produce. They broadened our understanding of different vegetables as we walked their fields, adding to our sensitivity in preparing and combining them into tasty, wholesome fare. Our menu was planned around what the growers chose to deliver to us each week. Imagine creating a variety of recipes out of a mass of pumpkins one week or only root vegetables, napa cabbage and field salad (mache) for a couple of weeks!

These type of situations challenged rather than limited us, and the results were some unusual recipes for soups, salads, entrees and desserts. Soon our customers were caught up in the excitement of a variety of delicious dishes, even those prepared from rutabagas, beets, and celeriac—foods they often shunned. Complementary herbs were used to enhance the particular qualities of individual vegetables with flavorful results. Our dining room became a gathering place, where tips on appropriate foods and herbal teas for health were shared amongst our customers and ourselves. A developing network of farmers, producers, distributors and others dedicated to a humanistic and environmentally concerned approach to business life associated there as well.

Later when Wolfgang and I returned to the U.S. we eagerly anticipated engaging in similar activities, especially around Biodynamic and organic produce grown in the local region. There just didn't seem to be much enthusiasm in that direction here. However, we did find some common interests within the food cooperative movement. Then in 1990 we moved to Sunways/Biodynamic CSA farm in Housatonic, Massachusetts. At the request of the gardeners there, I began to write some weekly "Leaves" to go in the shares giving tips on using unfamiliar vegetables and various ways to prepare food from an abundant crop. With the broadening interest and encouragement of a number of people, and now living in northern Vermont, I have completed a series of 52 leaves for using local garden vegetables around the calendar. They are as valid here as in more temperate climates. Here are some samples of the "Leaves".

*** HAIL TO KALE! ***

Old King Kale is **a hearty old Kohl**—rich in flavor and nutrients like calcium, iron, vitamins A and C. Kale has reigned in Europe from December through Winter's end due to its heartiness and availability. To many it is considered ready for consumption **ONLY after a good frost.**

In northern Europe it was washed and hung in a net in windows for **decoration**—and in the hopes it would freeze through and thus reach its fullness.

A bouquet head of **decorative kale** appears elegant enough to be carried by a bride or on other festive occasions—later to be **steamed for supper!**

The Scots made it into a **hearty soup**. Thick, cooked with onions & oats and seasoned with thyme, one is warmed to the gills and ready to ward off colds and flu.

Kale was **traditionally eaten** on Sylvester (New Year's Eve) in Germany to **ward off money problems** in the coming year. Try diagonally sliced kale, **steamed or sauteed** with allspice, and piled high in the center of a ring-mold of **barley** that has been cooked with bay leaf & sage.

Delicious and eye-appealing is sauteed or **whole-leaf kale.** Wash in water with added salt (causing any tiny hidden creatures to surface) and stand on stems to drain well. Snip stems off to leaf bottom and saute separated kale leaves quickly on both sides in oil—pressing lightly with spatula—dash with allspice or nutmeg. Let these deep green, crunchy leaves be enjoyed for their full-bodied kale flavor. Use as **an emerald leaf** bed upon which to serve grains and kidney beans or other vegetables for deep color contrast! (Can be steamed whole as well.)

Try marjoram leaf as a tasty complement to **early kale.** Sprinkle it on before lightly steaming or sauteing.

Kale can also be **served raw**—finely sliced diagonally across the leaf. Mix with other seasonal greens for kohlslaw; with red cabbage for festive color; with grated daikon radish—zesty for taste buds and digestion.

* ONIONS *

The noble onion—a juicy, aromatic, and flavorful bulb—is **an edible gift to humanity from the lily family.** In Winter we can be grateful for the **enhancing taste** it lends to many a dish, sauce or soup. **Revered** throughout the Ages **as healer and health-giver**, it still plays a major role in cuisines worldwide today.

The healing properties of the onion have long been used in **treating colds**—from wrapping slices in a hot cloth and applying it externally for **sore throat**, to making a syrup of grated onion and honey to drink in hot milk or cider against **coughing**. Today we are more apt to think of **hot soup** when treating colds; and that usually implies brothy soups with onions as a base.

Onion Soup has become a standard favorite in Western cultures and is seen on most restaurant menus. Here, as in some other recipes, the onion stands on its own as a vegetable. Cook lots of chopped onions in a vegetable or other stock, **season with allspice, cloves, or garlic.**

Besides serving **creamed cooked onions** with paprika as a dish, consider **baking whole** parboiled onions with a clove or paprika in each, served with breadcrumbs—or—**filling whole onions** with wild rice, pilaf, or traditional bread stuffing. To do so, peel, cut the bottom flat, spoon out the centers with a teaspoon and fill. Bake or simmer covered for 30 minutes or until appearing a bit translucent.

Thyme, bay leaf, parsley, anise seed and curry are also **complementary seasonings** for onion dishes. Sprinkle thyme over chopped onions spread over thin whole-grain bread dough, top with grated Swiss cheese or sesame seeds and bake in a hot oven for **Alsace onion tart.** For **German-style onion kuchen**, cover biscuit dough with lightly sauteed chopped onions, butter, cheese, nuts or sesame seeds and bake.

To bring out the best in onions, choose a size that can be used at once as their sulfur content develops a bitterness when exposed to air; **freshly peel, slice and cook or serve immediately.** NEVER SLICE AHEAD! **How sweet they are!**

* CELERIAC *

Celeriac—or celery knob—is widely used in the German kitchen, while the wide green stalk variety of celery is a rarity there. Long regarded as one of the healthiest of vegetables, this flavor-packed root finds its way into bean pots, soups, stews—and even into Autumn and Winter salads.

Celeriac is especially good fare for those with rheumatism, diabetes, digestive as well as kidney problems, and is highly recommended in helping to fight colds and alleviate coughs. . . . In a good **hot soup** perhaps?

Lentil soup is always associated with **celeriac** for me—after watching Lothar put a whole one into a potful he was preparing in his kitchen in Cologne! It made delicious, hearty fare.

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It's a tasty addition to root **vegetable soup** as well, with carrot, turnip and onion chunks or cubes. Add thyme in good measure to the pot for well-seasoned stock.

Vegetable stews are enhanced with the addition of **celeriac.**

Consider **cream of celeriac soup,** made with finely grated **celeriac**, minced onion, and coriander. Of course one can also simmer the vegetables in chunks and puree. Enrich with a light miso or cream.

In our restaurant we used to dredge 1/2" round slices of **celeriac** in whole-grain flour and saute in oil to make vegetarian 'schnitzel' (cutlet). Add marjoram and spaghetti sauce or nutmeg and white sauce for a scrumptious entree.

Finely grated **celeriac** complements grated fresh beets or carrots for salad. Add apples—walnuts too for waldorf style. Splash with lemon juice & oil, or mix with yogurt for dressing.

To CLEAN celeriac, soak a bit in water to loosen soil in crevices; scrub well with a brush—little need to peel—and cut away small snarling roots (use these in vegetable stock). **Clean just before use**. It keeps better soiled.

HEART BEETS FOR YOU !

Make **Valentine's Day** heartwarming with a dish of Red Beet Hearts. Notch out the stem end of whole beets in a "V" shape and then slice vertically from stem to root. Voila! **Heart-shaped slices**. Season with tarragon leaves and steam or simmer them until tender-crisp. Blend one tablespoon of arrowroot powder to one cup of tart fruit juice (or lemon juice and water) and pour over the hot beets, simmering until the heart slices appear glazed.

A sweet-sour flavor is very complementary to beets. Red sour cherries, raisins, pineapple or orange cuts can be added in the cooking for further appeal. Freshly grated ginger, horseradish, mustard or allspice bring good flavor as well. For lighter tasting herbs, use basil, dill or tarragon.

Long considered important in blood-building, **red beets are rich in minerals**—potassium, calcium, magnesium and iron—to name a few. Their **trace minerals, so vital to us**, reside just under the skin, so scrub if covered with soil, but **don't peel** away all that goodness! In their early juicy-crisp state, beets have tender thin skins and need only be washed to remove soil. **Strengthening** in times of colds and flu, red beets pressed into juice are said to aid in fever.

What is more **warming on a cold day** than a Red Beet **Borscht**. For authenticity add lactic-acid fermented beets or sauerkraut just before serving! Ladle over rice or boiled potato and top with yogurt or tofu blended with horseradish. It's also good with wholegrain rye bread.

In hot weather ladle chilled **puree of fresh beet soup** seasoned with fresh tarragon or basil over red or black raspberries. Adds a delightful tart bite midst the sweetness of beets.

For **a colorful tasty dish**, dice and cook red beets. Combine green pickle relish with yogurt, a white or tofu sauce with optional horseradish and fold into the hot beets and serve. Or chill this bright pink dish and serve as a salad. If you're cooking with one of the **yellow or white** strains of **beets**, try an onion, orange. hazelnut sauce—elegant!

Make a red beet **aspic** from red beet/vegetable broth, with grated beets and celeriac added before it sets. A red **fruit juice gel** is also nice with grated beets and apple.

Finely grated beets and fresh ginger tossed with coarsely grated apple and lemon juice is a really **refreshing salad**. Similarly combine beets, radish, and parsley with allspice or anise seed. If you prefer, **toss finely-grated fresh new beets with lots of luscious greens**, along with the blueberries or black raspberries. Add a lemon juice, oil & dill dressing and top with the radishes—grated or thin sliced.

Finely grated fresh beets are also delicious **in breakfast "muesli"**, with fresh berries in season or dried fruits.

Treat tossed salads to some red-veined green leaves of Summer **beet tops**. They are delicious cooked in place of spinach as well—just as that crop fades with Summer's heat.

Puree 1# of fresh baby beets; add the juice of 1 - 2 lemons, herbs—basil or dill—and tamari or salt to taste; blend well with 1/4C of light oil. Mix this thick colorful dressing with cool, cooked grains such as rice or buckwheat, along with green onion snips. A nice alternative to macaroni or potato salad.

CARROTS

Drawing the **warmth of the Sun** and the **fragrance of blossoms** into the **gold of its root**, the carrot participates in **true alchemy**. Its rich stores of nourishing qualities combine with sweet succulence to make it **a vegetable that is welcomed by all** ages. Infants find carrots pleasing as a first food; children enjoy the crispy crunch of raw carrots as a snack; grated carrots as garnish and in a variety of salads are a favorite of the adult population.

Available year-round, in the garden or root storage in sand or cellar, **carrots provide a wealth of opportunities** to create delicious dishes. The **key** to enjoy this healthy root is to **scrub** with a stiff brush just before use; **rarely** does it need **paring**—valuable minerals lie just beneath its surface; **finely grate or lightly cook** to activate enzymes that unlock nutrients. The admonition to **chew well** applies to eating **carrot sticks**, otherwise its goodness might pass through the digestive tract mostly as bulk.

To enhance the flavor of carrots, season in cold weather with ground coriander or mace, freshly grated ginger, or dried thyme leaves. Added dashes of allspice are nice, as are strewn minced parsley **for complements.** When its hot, use basil, cilantro or fennel green—added slices of fresh organic apricots, peaches, pineapple or citrus complement carrots then too. In changing weather, choose chervil.

Carrots and millet are a good combination for a number of easily prepared dishes warmly accepted by the finicky as well as the robust eater. **A favorite** in our restaurant was **millet cooked** with coriander as the grain of the day, **topped** on a plate **with sliced carrots** lightly cooked with fresh ginger, **with a** spicy nutbutter **sauce**, creamy spinach puree or light hummus **poured over.**

Millet-carrot **soup** cooked with lots of vegetable broth and seasoned with any of the above spices, chervil or thyme leaves is **delicious and restorative**. A light miso—white or chickpea—can be added for flavor and protein complement; or add well-cooked chickpeas and parsley.

Pureed carrot soup is always delicious. Make with onions or leek and season with freshly grated ginger for warmth or your choice of complementary herbs. For richness add miso or cream.

Carrots make a surprisingly **good salad dressing.** As with beets, puree them in their fresh state, adding herbs, lemon juice, oil & salt or tamari, maintaining a thick consistency and intense flavor. Keeps well for weeks in a jar when refrigerated. Particularly good for dressing grain salads as well as over the heartier greens.

Can also be warmed and served over cooked grains, like whole oats.

Don't discard **all** those carrot tops! Fresh from the garden they contain vital nutrients and are most high in light-bearing silica. Snip a **little** into salads, garnish soups and other dishes containing cooked carrots—for health as well as color complement. Put some in the stock pot too, but be **careful not to overwhelm** it with their strength.

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