

# COOKING FRESH



Get it while you can—July through September, the local harvest is at its heart-pounding height. Eclipsed is the tender green of spring's asparagus, peas, and chives. Warm weather incites a whole riotous rainbow of colors and flavors as roots swell, vines slither, stalks soar and fruits blush. Even in these sweltering city streets we feel the crescendo of the local harvest as bumper crops bump into one another, and we make hay (or rather pesto) while the sun shines. Brooklyn swelters in summer but the foods of the high season are blessedly, bracingly refreshing raw, and ask no love from the heat of your dreaded stove. Cucumbers, peppers, never-ending tomatoes, even corn (yup, when it's fresh we love it raw) come as they are, contorting into salsas, salads, and cold summer soups with no more coaxing than a chopping board's, while heartbreakingly ripe berries, melons, peaches, plums, apricots and nectarines require the barest of labors: bite and swallow. The year's very first apples startle us in late July and remind us of our mortality—or at least the season's. In fact the daylight has been getting cruelly shorter since the first day of summer. Have a ball with that summer squash while you can. Like Cinderella's carriage, it will soon turn into a pumpkin.

## MEAT AND SEAFOOD

American Eel  
Blackfish  
Black Sea Bass  
Blowfish  
Blue Crab  
Bluefish  
Butterfish  
Chicken & Eggs  
Clams, Conch  
Dogfish  
Flounder, Fluke  
Herring & Herring Roe  
(Shad & Shad Roe)  
Lobster  
Mackerel  
Mako Shark  
Milk & Cheese  
Monkfish  
Mussels, Oysters  
Perch  
Porgies  
Striped Bass  
Sea Robin, Sea Scallop  
Skate, Squid, Swordfish  
Tilefish, Tuna  
Weakfish, Whitebait

## PRODUCE

Apricots  
Beans  
Beets  
Blackberries, Blueberries  
Broccoli  
Cabbage, Carrots  
Cherries, Corn  
Cucumbers  
Eggplant  
Fennel  
Garlic  
Greens (Chard, Collards,  
Kale & Mustard)  
Leeks  
Melons  
Mushrooms (farmed and wild)  
Onion  
Peaches/Nectarines  
Plums  
Peas  
Peppers  
Potatoes (new)  
Radishes  
Summer Squash  
Tomatoes  
Turnips

## SUMMER SQUASH PANCAKES

Adapted from *Vegetables Every Day* by Jack Bishop

These savory pancakes are pan-fried in a film of olive oil until the exterior becomes crisp. The interior remains soft and a bit creamy. I sometimes serve these (one to a person) as a plated first course over some baby greens. They can also be served as a side, or serve two per person as a light summer supper, perhaps accompanied by a salad of perfect tomatoes.

1 lb. zucchini or other summer squash	1 large egg
1 large garlic clove, minced	½ c. flour
¾ tsp. salt	4 tbsp olive oil
¼ tsp. black pepper	1 lemon, cut into wedges

1. Trim the squash and shred using the large holes of a grater. Wrap the shredded squash in several layers of paper towels or in a clean kitchen towel and squeeze until the squash is dry.
2. Place the shredded squash in a large bowl. Add the garlic, salt, pepper, and egg and mix well. Stir in the flour.
3. Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a medium nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add a ¼ c. batter to the pan and shape into a 2- to 3-inch patty. Quickly repeat until the pan is full but not too crowded. Saute until the pancakes are nicely browned on the bottom, 2-3 minutes. Flip and cook 2-3 minutes longer. Transfer to a plate lined with a paper towel.
4. Repeat with more oil and batter. Serve hot with lemon wedges. Serves 6-8 as a side dish or 4 as a light main course.

Freegan, *n* : a person who salvages society's wasted food and other resources.



## JERRY TRAUNFELD'S COLD BORSCHT WITH DILLED SOUR CREAM

*When I was very young, my family would drive into Brooklyn on Sundays to visit my grandmothers. The first stop was the tiny one-room studio apartment of my father's mother, Pauline, who was born in Poland and spoke Yiddish to us. The air in the hallways was always punctuated with the oniony smell of Sunday dinners cooking in kitchens without exhaust fans. Once in her apartment we would sit on plastic slipcovers and be lavishly fed. In summer the room was oppressively hot, but this cold beet borscht was always on the table. Its refreshing sweet-sour flavor never failed to cool us, yet looking back I think it was the soup's magenta color that enticed me most. Now, it's my favorite summer soup. I don't think my bube (Yiddish for grandmother) ever put fresh dill in hers, but I think she would have approved of this version.*

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| 6 c. water   | ¾ tsp. salt                          |
| 4 medium-large beets (about 1¾ lbs.), peeled and halved or quartered | 3 tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice |
| 1 medium onion, coarsely chopped                                     | ½ c. sour cream                      |
| 1 tbsp. sugar  | 2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh dill    |
- Serves 8

1. Beets. Place the water, beets, onion, sugar and salt in a medium (4-quart) saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover, and simmer until the beets are tender, 45 to 60 minutes.

2. Soup. Remove half the beets with a slotted spoon and let cool. Puree the soup with the remaining beets in two batches in a blender or food processor until smooth and pour it into a large bowl or plastic container. Add the lemon juice. Grate the cooled beets on the large holes of a hand grater and add them to the soup. Taste and add additional salt or lemon juice if needed. Cover and refrigerate until chilled. The

soup will keep for up to five days.

3. Garnish. Mix the sour cream with the fresh dill and serve generous dollops of it on the ice-cold soup.

Variation: A raw egg is traditionally added to cold borscht. It adds richness and lightens the color. If you are comfortable with the idea of eating raw eggs, blend the freshest one you can find into the soup after it's chilled but before you add the grated beets. If you add egg, don't keep the soup for longer than two days in the refrigerator.

From the *Herbfarm Cookbook* by Jerry Traunfeld (Scribner, 2000).



## STONE FRUIT SALSA

Fresh salsa is shockingly easy to make, and far superior to anything you can buy. Stone fruits such as nectarines, peaches, and apricots are abundant and delicious in summer. I fell in love with this fruity salsa at Rose Water restaurant a few years ago and begged the chef for the

recipe, which I make all summer long. It's great under fish, chicken or pork, but I usually just eat it with corn chips. If making ahead, add fruit just before serving. This version has no heat; add minced chilis to taste if you prefer your salsa picante.

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| 3 ripe but firm stone fruits: nectarines, peaches, or apricots (4-5), or any combination, pitted and diced | roughly chopped                        |
| 3 large tomatoes, diced  | ½ small bunch parsley, roughly chopped |
| 1 red onion, minced  | 1 tbsp. minced fresh ginger (optional) |
| 2 cloves garlic, minced  | 3 lemons, juiced                       |
| 20 leaves basil, ripped  | ¼ c. olive oil                         |
| ½ small bunch cilantro,  | salt and pepper to taste               |

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Let sit for 15 minutes while flavors combine. Serves 4.