

TASTE

SLICE OF HEAVEN?

Get a taste of Gennaro's Tomato Pie.

Coming Sunday in SJ Life



THE GRILLMASTERS

We went to the experts —and fresh Jersey produce —
to inspire your Independence Day party planning

By Marla Cimini For the Courier-Post

George Kyrtatas is passionate about his grilled vegetables, especially locally sourced, in-season, fresh vegetables from South Jersey.

As the owner and executive chef of SweetWater Bar & Grill in Cinnaminson, he explains, "There is nothing as pure and fresh as local vegetables picked only a day or two before you cook and serve them. The flavors and colors are bold."

And what better time to enjoy summertime produce for easy meal-making than for Fourth of July party planning?

"The vegetables almost beg you to brush with a little olive oil, sea salt, pepper and grill. They don't need anything else. No heavy sauces, no batters or frying ... just a little love."

SweetWater has several dishes featuring grilled vegetables, including their award-winning vegetable flatbread. It features a layer of pesto, grilled eggplant, mushrooms, tomatoes, spinach, artichoke hearts, balsamic glaze and crumbled goat cheese.

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Grilling

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"We also serve a grilled vegetable panini, which is fantastic in summer when Jersey vegetables are in full swing," Krytatas said. "It is topped with eggplant, grilled zucchini, bell peppers, fresh basil, melted mozzarella cheese, and then finished with a little splash of balsamic.

"I believe that if the vegetables are grilled properly, the natural beauty of the flavors are delightful," he said.

Kyrtatas isn't the only one who turns to the garden for inspiration.

Chef Aaron McCargo, Jr. was born and raised in Camden, and is the author of the cookbook, "Simply Well Done." As the host of the Food Network's show, "Big Daddy's House," he is working on plans to open a restaurant in Camden.

McCargo believes New Jersey fruits and vegetables are great for grilling for many reasons, including affordability and availability.

"The extreme sweetness of both fruits and vegetables allow for multiple uses on the grill, whether it's grilling the traditional asparagus and corn with some flavored wood chips for some extra profile, (or) grilling peaches and strawberries to add to a salad or dessert fruit tray," McCargo says. "You have options, and the sweetness helps balance the dish.

"The variety of the Jersey fruits and vegetables allow for your wildest, healthiest grilling recipes to become a reality — and to know that all it takes is the turning of the switch or lighting of the charcoal."

Avalon's The Diving Horse features locally grown ingredients, and executive chef Palmer Marinelli is eagerly looking forward to cooking with mid-summer vegetables.

"Right now, we are grilling spring onions for a dish of calamari with ajo blanco (the Spanish white gazpacho traditionally served with grilled new onions). We also char baby onions before pickling them for the 'onion petals' on our beef tartare. We offer New Jersey asparagus that are grilled and served with yellow tomato and crab."

Corporate Executive Chef Michael Fiorello is heading up the soon-to-open Distrito restaurant in Moorestown, managing the opening and menu development. He enjoys grilling outdoors in the summer, and says the eatery will feature grilled veggies on several dishes.

"First and foremost, New Jersey fruits and veggies are perfect for the grill simply because they are from our own 'backyard' — and the freshness is unparalleled. To cook and eat a vegetable or fruit that was in the ground less than 24 hours ago is an opportunity to experience a whole new set of aromatic compounds that wither after



SweetWater Bar & Grill chef George Kyrtatas believes if 'vegetables are grilled properly, the natural beauty of the flavors are delightful.' JOHN ZIOMEK/COURIER-POST

only two days in a refrigerator."

Joseph Muldoon, the executive chef and proprietor of Roberta's in Northfield, also enjoys experimenting on the grill.

"I love grilling each summer because with all that New Jersey produce has to offer, you can plan entire meals around fresh, grilled vegetables," he said. "I feel as though grilling can sometimes be the best way to enhance the flavor of foods — whether it is meats, vegetables, or even fruits."

"Now that we are approaching the height of the summer, it's easy to see that no state has better fruit and produce than New Jersey! The depth and sweet flavor that is

contained in our fruit can top any fish, game or poultry that is cooked beside them," Muldoon added.

"The flavor is developed so much while being grown that a grilled melon relish kept very simple would taste like the fruit has been macerated for hours — but it was just a fast grill on the open flame. When tomatoes become available, a quick char is all that is needed for salsas, pasta sauce, or the main element of the dish. Sauces can be created so easily with a grill, just make sure the produce is peeled and seeded before grilling so all you have to do is pulse it in a food processor and add fresh herbs and spices," Muldoon said.

"I like using a grill to quickly cook fruit be-

STEPS TO GREAT GRILLING

George Kyrtatas advises that a few simple steps can enhance the grilling process:

Precook: Certain vegetables do better if they are briefly cooked before being placed on the grill. For example, precook firm veggies like asparagus and carrots for about 3 to 5 minutes in a saucepan of simmering water. Potatoes also can be cut into slices or wedges and parboiled for about 10 minutes until just tender. This will help when you put them on the grill ... they cook quickly and evenly without burning.

Keep watch: To prevent burning, grill vegetables over indirect, moderate heat; turn them often; and move them to cooler parts of the grill as necessary. If you prefer a lower maintenance method, you can steam vegetables in foil packets rather than directly on the grill.

Versatility is key: You can choose whichever veggies you like, and can use them in so many ways. Grill them ahead of time, chill, and serve in an antipasto or mix into a garden pasta salad.

Michael Fiorello offers a few tips of his own:

Seasoning: Before marinating porous vegetables like zucchini, eggplant and yellow squash, season them with a little salt and let them sit over a colander to drain the excess moisture. They will absorb less oil and grill more evenly.

Lettuce: I love to grill all types of lettuces. Just brush with a little olive oil and season with sea salt and fresh cracked pepper before grilling for 30 to 45 seconds. Toss with a little lemon juice and shaved Parmesan.

Storage: Store grilled vegetables covered in extra virgin olive oil and herbs under refrigeration. They will last for weeks, and will develop more depth of flavor.

Aaron McCargo adds these tips:

Dessert: Grilled fruit kabobs drizzled with honey and served with a Greek yogurt is a good dessert alternative to the traditional fruit salad.

Freezing: Blanch and freeze any excess fruits or vegetables within days of purchase to use for smoothies, salsas or soups at a later date.

Fun: Try the "You bring it, you grill it" policy at your next barbecue. It allows everyone to bring their favorite grilling item, so we can all learn different techniques and secrets while having fun.

— Marla Cimini

cause the open flame caramelizes and changes the flavor of the fruit without penetrating deeply into the actual flesh, so you

can have a warm crisp melon or peach and it will still be cool, sweet and refreshing at the same time."