



DANDELION GREENS: These greens, left, have a slightly bitter flavour.



SPINACH: Familiar vegetable, above, is versatile and has a hearty flavour.

Mean greens



KALE: This green, left, tastes mild and cabbage-like. It's a good source of calcium.

Women in program share food, memories

BY NICHOLAS PURDON
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

There was a time when Joann Sampson risked her life to pick the leaves of the dasheen plant.

That was in October, 1983, when Joann was a 15-year-old living in Grenada with her mother and 16 siblings. The second coup d'etat in four years plunged the Caribbean nation into a state of emergency. The constitution was suspended and parliament was dissolved.

Joann remembers being told that if she went outside, she'd be shot on sight.

"Food was very scarce in our home," says Sampson, who now lives in Toronto. "There was no meat and no means of getting food, so we had to make do with what we had. We were desperate.

"My mother was a very sympathetic woman. She was very concerned about our health. And when one day she decided to go outside and pick the leaves of the dasheen tree to make a Callaloo soup, I was scared of losing her. So I went along. I was very, very scared, but we picked as many leaves as possible, very quickly, and rushed back inside.

Callaloo is a huge type of green that is sometimes referred to as Caribbean spinach.

"Callaloo was never my favourite soup before that," Sampson recalls. "But it was wonderful to know that we were having soup for dinner. For some reason, that soup tasted much better than any other time we had it, even though there was no meat in it."

Today Sampson, 30, is a student at the 12-month Focus on Food training program in downtown Toronto. As part of the course, each of the eight women enrolled guides the others through the preparation of a food which helps her tell her life story.

"I chose Callaloo soup because it means a lot to me today," Sampson says. "It reminds me of a time in my life when everything was hard and food was scarce. And it tastes great, too."

The women in the program learn everything from computer literacy and nutrition to the ins and outs of catering. The program is run under the umbrella of FoodShare Toronto.

Focus on Food first started in 1995 as a provincially-funded organization designed to help women on social assistance re-enter the work force in the food sector. Since then, the Conserva-

Leafy vegetables are different, delicious and downright nutritious

BY BARB HOLLAND
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Most of us have at least a passing acquaintance with spinach — those rather well-known if much-maligned greens preferred by Popeye and made popular in the 1970s as a salad ingredient.

But, when cruising the produce section of your local supermarket, have you ever wondered about lesser-known members of this vegetable family, such as swiss chard, kale, collard greens and rapini?

Just how do you cook them and what do they taste like?

It's worth finding out, since all leafy greens are downright delicious if properly prepared, as well as being extremely good for you.

Ranging in flavour from mild to quite sharp and al-

sources of vitamins A and C, and contribute calcium, iron, fibre and other nutrients to one's diet.

But aside from nutrients, they add a burst of colour and a spicy bite to dishes.

With the exception of rapini, which is picked in Ontario fields from August to the end of October, local greens are available as early as May and through to September.

These leafy greens are crops that prefer cool nights and grow best in spring and fall, when they are most plentiful, rather than in the hot summer months of July and August.

From October through May, the states of Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina and Texas provide these leafy greens, making them available year-round.

PURCHASING, STORAGE

■ All leafy greens have a high water content, so they wilt easily. Once faded, they're hard to revive. Buy the freshest, greenest leaves. Don't buy yellow or discoloured greens.

■ When buying greens for cooking, remember that they cook down considerably — to a quarter or less of their original volume. So purchase accordingly. For example: 1 pound (500 grams) of raw kale yields about 2½ cups of cooked kale and 1 pound (500 grams) of mustard greens yields about 1½ cups of cooked greens. The others fall somewhere in between.

■ For best texture and flavour, use greens as soon as possible after purchasing them. Store them unwashed in the refrigerator, lightly wrapped in damp paper

Recipix

BAKED CHICKEN BREASTS WITH COARSE-GRAINED MUSTARD & TARRAGON

HERE'S YER TIP~ CHOP DRIED HERBS (TARRAGON IN THIS CASE) ALONG WITH PARSLEY. IT WILL BRING THE DRIED HERB BACK TO LIFE... A BIT ANYWAYS.

CHANGE TARRAGON TO BASIL OR A PINCH OF ROSEMARY FOR CHANGE IN TASTE. FOOL AROUND! GO WILD & SEE WHAT HAPPENS!

ME? GO WILD??

FOOL AROUND? ALRIGHT!

BROUGHT 2 U BY FRANCES 'NO TIME 4 TURDUCKEN?' BEAULIEA~

IT'S ALL TOO TRUE, FELLA!

IS IT A BIRD? ... IS IT A PLANE? NO! NO! NO! IT MUST BE THE GREAT CHEF-A-ROONIES AND THEIR FASTER-THAN-A-SPEEDING-BULLET CHICKEN! O WOW O WOW

1 CUP BREADCRUMBS
1 TSP CRUMBLED, DRIED TARRAGON
1 TSP MINCED FRESH PARSLEY
SALT & PEPPER TO TASTE
1 1/2 TBSP COARSE-GRAINED DIJON MUSTARD
1 1/2 TBSP BUTTER, MELTED
1 WHOLE BONELESS CHICKEN BREAST (ABOUT 3/4 LB/375G), HALVED

IN SHALLOW DISH, STIR BREADCRUMBS, TARRAGON, PARSLEY, SALT & PEPPER TOGETHER.
IN SMALL BOWL, WHISK MUSTARD & BUTTER TOGETHER. COAT CHICKEN WITH MUSTARD MIXTURE & DREDGE WITH BREADCRUMB MIXTURE. PLACE CHICKEN ON RACK. PLACE RACK ON BAKING PAN & BAKE IN PREHEATED 475F OVEN 6-8 MIN PER SIDE, UNTIL COOKED THROUGH BUT STILL JUICY
MAKES 2 SERVINGS

Food the focus of job training for women

Continued from F1

tive government has cut the funding. This year, only a donation from a private foundation has kept the program alive.

The women got their first big break a few months ago when they helped FoodShare cater the Jane Jacobs: Ideas That Matter conference, which was attended by 650 delegates from 15 countries. (Jane Jacobs is a local urbanologist.)

But according to Zahra Parvian, 45, the group's life skills teacher and "big sister," the program is about much more than food. She stresses the importance of balancing specific skills with group work and learning to trust one another.

"You can't teach people only one aspect of something. You have to be holistic," says Parvian, who fled Iran in 1988 and came to Canada in 1992 as a landed immigrant. "Without a healthy mind, you can't have a healthy body."

Parvian already has a Bachelor's degree from Tehran University and is now working on her Master's of Social Work degree at York University. She says she is one of the happiest members of the social work program because of her work with the Focus on Food group.

"When they share their personal life in the group," Parvian says, "I feel I did something great. I helped them to trust each other. We live in a society where trust is difficult."

While each woman's story is unique, preparing each dish as a group binds them together. And when the preparation is over, they set the table and eat together.

"For me, the food we share shows how we're all connected. We're all linked," says Joyce Lowe, 60, who came to Canada in the late 1970s from Guyana. She is preparing Peperpot, a stew made from cows' feet that is the Guyanese national dish.

"I was a person who never liked to speak," Lowe says. "I always kept back. But since I've been in this program, I started talking so much. Now I can't stay quiet. I feel free to express myself."

For Victoria Gallardo, 38, preparing Pastel de Choclo, a corn and beef casserole, has

taught her about the history of her country. Through her research, she found that what she always thought of as a purely Chilean dish has, in fact, indigenous and Spanish roots. The corn is native to South America, while the paprika and olives were brought over by the Spanish.

"The food mirrors the colonial history of my country," she says. "It's something you never think about. When I was young, I didn't know this part of our history. Food tells you something about the past. At the same time, it gives me a sense of belonging somewhere. And by sharing my recipe, I make connections with other people."

There are two one-month placements which the women must complete to graduate from the program. The locations vary from food banks and missions to private restaurants and catering companies. The final placement is in May, one month before graduation.

FUTURE UNCERTAIN

"It's a wonderful program," says Lowe, who has been cooking at the Salvation Army detox centre for the past eight years. "We're leaving a lot here. But my plan is to open a small business of my own."

Sampson has similar aspirations.

"I'm going to college," she says. "I'll take baking and open my own pastry shop. I can make great coconut buns, patties and Black Cakes" (dark fruitcakes steeped in rum, also called Wedding Cakes).

In this era of cost cutting, the future of the program is uncertain. The money from the private foundation which floated the program this past year is drying up. However, Parvian isn't giving up.

"I'm an optimistic person," she says. "But I don't want to be blind. Adult training programs are not a priority of this government. I'm just not sure they'll give us the money."

Nicholas Purdon is a freelance writer and broadcaster living in Toronto.

The Cutting Edge and Quick Cuisine will return

Meet offspring of Mondavi marriages

As in the rest of the corporate world, when a winery gets big, it wants to get bigger. Look at Vincor, the winery formerly known as Brights-Cartier-Inniskillin-London.

Another way to expand is to enter joint ventures with wineries in other parts of the world which have marketing expertise and technological support to offer.

This "wine bride" syndrome has become fashionable ever since the Robert Mondavi Winery in California joined forces with Château Mouton-Rothschild, which makes first growth claret, to create the Opus One red wine in 1979 — the experience and prestige of Bordeaux brought to bear on nubile Napa Valley fruit.

Mondavi has gone on to effect more of these marriages

Vintage Point

TONY ASPLER

Caliterra. The latest offspring of their joint winemaking is a concentrated, jammy red called Sena (pronounced Senya). A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and an almost extinct Bordeaux variety called Carmenère, Sena 1995 retails in the United States for \$50 (U.S.).

In Italy, Mondavi has hooked up with the noble Frescobaldi family in Tuscany, who have been making Chianti there for a mere 700 years.

Together, in the Montalcino region, they sired a 50/50 Merlot-Sangiovese blend called Luce, which costs \$75 (U.S.), followed by its baby brother,

Lucente 1995.

Michael Mondavi and Marchese Leonardo de' Frescobaldi were in Toronto last Wednesday to launch Lucente at Acqua restaurant.

Lucente is mainly Sangiovese, with a small proportion of Merlot, all from Frescobaldi estates in Montalcino and Chianti. When it comes to Vintages stores in the fall, it will sell for \$34.95. It can also be obtained from importer Philippe Dandurand Wines at (416) 368-3344.

Lucente combines the structure of a Chianti with the flesh of a New World wine. Flavours of black cherry and red currant mingle with bitter chocolate to a tannic finish. Two years in the bottle will reward the savvy buyer.

WINE AND CHEESE: If you missed the Toronto Wine & Cheese Show last weekend, here are the winning wines in two categories.

■ Red wines under \$10

Gold medal: KWV Paarl Roodeberg 1995 (South Africa) tied with Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo 1996 (Chile).

Silver medal: Domaine Oriental Cabernet Sauvignon 1996 (Chile).

Bronze medal: Adega Coop Borba 1996 (Portugal).

■ White wines under \$10

Gold medal: Baron Philippe de Rothschild Chardonnay 1996 (Pays d'Oc).

Silver medal: Vinoteca Chardonnay 1996 (Ontario).

Bronze medal: Pelee Island Sauvignon Blanc 1996 (Ontario).