

FARE

Translations and Traditions from the World of Food, plus One Good Bottle, Agenda, and More

AGENDA

APRIL

5

LAMB COOK-OFF

Vail, Colorado

Lamb is big in the Rocky Mountain State—Colorado is the country's third-largest producer of the meat—so it's fitting that the Taste of Vail festival starts with a lamb cook-off. Chefs from local restaurants will rub, glaze, roast, and braise tender pieces of the meat, and visitors can sample the results in tents set up on the town's main streets. Last year's dishes included lamb pot stickers, lamb burgers, and lamb ravioli with Thai curry sauce. If the high altitude doesn't make you woozy, be sure to check out the wine tastings. Information: 970/926-5665.

APRIL

8

NATIONAL GRITS FESTIVAL

Warwick, Georgia

In 2002 the Georgia House of Representatives passed a resolution naming Warwick "the Grits Capital of Georgia". In keeping with this distinction, the town holds an annual celebration of the coarsely ground corn. After a grits-and-eggs breakfast, fes-



tivalgoers can enter numerous grits-related competitions, including the Roll in the Quaker Instant Grits contest, where contestants are judged by how much weight they gain from the grits stuck to their hair and clothes. Information: 229/881-6297.

Campus Chow

Who needs ramen and brewskies when there's a cart selling bulgogi on the quad?

COLLEGE DINING halls across the country may be dishing up sustainable, free-range, Slow Food fare, but many students are favoring the foods—some with authentic ethnic cred, others improvised to suit undergrad schedules and wallets—they're finding at the carts and trucks that ply their trade on campus.

In Ithaca, New York, Cornell students flock to the Hot Truck, a nocturnal mealmobile, in operation since 1960, that turns out Poor Man's Pizza. The PMP is French bread with marinara sauce, mozzarella, and an assortment of optional toppings, including mayonnaise, hot sauce, and meatballs. Ordering requires knowledge of an argot spoken fluently by the devoted—for example, "G and G", for "Grease and Garden" (add mayo and lettuce), or "high carbon" (crust that's a little burnt).

The "grease trucks" that cluster in a parking lot on the campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, have devised an ingenious way to satisfy voracious, value-hungry degree seekers: they offer an assortment of "fat" sandwiches, so named because they combine several meals into one. The creation called the Fat Knight, for instance, combines cheese steak, chicken fingers, mozzarella sticks, and fries on a single roll.

Elsewhere students can choose from a broader banquet. A de facto food court on University Place at the University of Vermont caters to vegetarians and omnivores alike: Ahli Baba restaurant

Kee, which pulls up across the street from Penn's Wharton School, cooks Chinese food that merited two stars from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Near the University of Pittsburgh's Hillman Library, Vinay



Jonesey's wagon, near the University of Southern Mississippi, above. Right, sandwich time at a truck near the University of Pennsylvania.

dispatches a truck to sell falafel, vegetable pakora, and sweet potato fries. Within easy reach of the University of Pennsylvania and at Drexel and Temple universities, in Philadelphia, there is not just cheese steak but an array of international fare, including kimchi, bulgogi, and falafel—and a truck called Yue



A P R I L

14

VIERNES SANTO

Cuzco, Peru

On Good Friday, a bustling fair is held in Cuzco's main square to commemorate the Last Supper. For sale are fresh sugarcane, coconut cookies, and sweet empanadas. The evening feast, composed of *doce platos* (12 dishes) to symbolize the 12 Apostles, is very much a family affair. But visitors may go to local restaurants to experience the traditional dishes, like Friday soup—a seafood stew made of fish or shrimp, potatoes, milk, and, often, fish eggs. Information: 51/84 263646.

A P R I L

16

Anniversary:

DAGWOOD SANDWICH

1936, New York City

Sixty years ago, Dagwood Bumstead, Blondie's husband in her namesake comic strip, created a sandwich that he thought might be a "new sensation". In truth, the first Dagwood was more like an edible Jenga tower, layered with tongue, onion, mustard, sardines, beans, and horseradish. Since then, delis all over the country have been pay-



ing homage with their takes on the sandwich, although the chances of finding one filled with a dozen eggs still in the carton—another classic Dagwood ingredient—are slim.

A P R I L

22

SUGAR FESTIVAL

Clewiston, Florida

Clewiston has been dubbed America's Sweetest Town, and every April, at the end of the sugarcane harvest, it brings out the sweets to prove it. The event was first held back in the 1930s, and today there are confectionery contests of every imaginable kind. Last year's best of show was a triple-layer almond mousse pie. There's also a three-mile "fun run" to help burn off the sucrose calories. Information: 863/983-7979.

FARE

Patidar, owner of the campus favorite Kashmiri, makes Indian dishes with spices he grinds daily. On the Carnegie Mellon campus, Sree's Lunch has South Indian specialties like upma, idli, and vada. The Library Mall, a quad on the University of Wisconsin's Madison campus, rivals Philadelphia's food truck population in diversity. Besides carts selling sushi and Indonesian chicken stew, there's one serving East African fare, where hungry Badgers can get their fix of doro wat.

Still, not everyone wants to sup at the global table. Several California universities, including UCLA and USC, welcome the In-N-Out burger truck—a mobile emissary from the family-owned cult Southern California burger chain of the same name—to their campuses. Once a semester, the truck parks outside the law school at Pepperdine University, in Malibu, to distribute free lunch (paid for by Pepperdine) to the aspiring legal eagles. And a short walk from the University of Southern Mississippi's campus, in the parking lot of the Hattiesburg Clinic, is Jonesey's wagon, run by Tammy Jones. Jonesey's is known for its two specialties: deep-fried Twinkies and deep-fried Oreos, both of them dipped in batter, fried in grease, and coated with a choice of chocolate syrup, strawberry syrup, or Cool-Whip. Forget the dreaded "freshman 15"; we're talking freshman 50 here. —JJ Goode



Spiny Wonder

Beneath that prickly exterior lies pure, delicious flavor

I ADMIT, IT MUST HAVE been quite a sight when my husband came into the kitchen one evening last spring and confronted a counter littered with severed bits of cacti, rather than our usual carrots and spinach. I was trying to create a salad using nopales, which I had often seen throughout our home state, Texas, but never before attempted to serve. "Did we run out of groceries?" he asked.

To the uninitiated, nopales, or prickly pear cactus pads, are an unusual and somewhat daunting food choice, yet they are an integral part of traditional Mexican cuisine—so integral, in fact, that they've

earned a place of honor on the nation's tricolor flag. "If you look closely at the eagle on the flag, you'll see he's sitting on a prickly pear cactus," says Jeffrey Pilcher, a historian of Mexican food.

Today the versatile vegetable can still be found in myriad Mexican dishes, from salsas verdes to soups and salads. Its flavor most closely resembles that of a tangy green bean, making it a good companion for savory items like grilled meats; it's also delicious on its

A farmer in Tlaxcalancingo, above, harvesting nopales. Facing page, top, nopales salad with jalapeño dressing.

own. The popularity of nopales peaks in Mexico during the Lenten season, when the tender pads are harvested for a shrimp stew called *revoltijo*. Nopales even have their very own celebration: every April the town of Tlaxcalancingo, in Puebla state, which is surrounded by nopales fields,

RECIPE

Nopales Salad with Jalapeño Dressing

SERVES 4

This recipe is an adaptation of one that author Jennifer Acosta Scott uses at home.

- 2 jalapeños, stemmed, seeded, and chopped
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/3 cup cilantro leaves, coarsely chopped
- 1 tbsp. fresh lime juice
- Pinch ground cumin
- Salt
- 4 medium nopales (prickly pear cactus pads; see page 93)
- 1 tomatillo, husked and cored
- 1 small red onion, peeled and diced
- 1/2 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and diced
- 1 ripe avocado

1. Purée jalapeños, sour cream, 1/4 cup of the cilantro, lime juice, and cumin in a food processor until smooth. Transfer to a bowl, season to taste with salt, cover, and refrigerate for 3 hours.

2. Place each cactus pad on a work surface, hold base with a kitchen towel, and shave off thorny bumps on each side with a sharp knife. Blanch cactus and tomatillo in a large pot of boiling salted water over high heat. Remove tomatillo when tender, about 5 minutes, rinse in cold water, and transfer to a plate. Cook cactus until tender, about 5 minutes more, rinse in cold water, and transfer to plate. Cut cactus crosswise into 1/2"-wide strips and return to pot to let cook for 2-3 minutes more to remove excess slime. Drain cactus, rinse in cold water, and dry with paper towels. Transfer cactus to a bowl. Dice tomatillo and add to bowl. Add onions and peppers, season to taste with salt, cover, and refrigerate for 3 hours.

3. To serve, halve avocado, discard pit and skin, and thinly slice lengthwise. Toss together avocado, cactus mixture, dressing, and salt to taste in a serving bowl. Garnish with remaining cilantro.



holds its Festival de Nopales, a two-day fête at which celebrants can sample a profusion of nopales dishes, including stuffed nopales, nopales salad, and even nopales ice cream.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of cooking nopales, besides prying off their sharp spines, is dealing with the *baba*, the slimy and tasteless fluid that seeps from the pads once they've been cut. Boiling the slices and rinsing them in cold water seems to remove most traces of the gunk. Other old-world tricks consist of adding tomatillo husks to the boiling water and using a copper pot.

And my finicky husband? Despite some initial grumbling about the unusual nature of that night's headline ingredient, he grudgingly pronounced my nopales salad "pretty good". I think we're making progress. (For information on nopales, see THE PANTRY, page 93.) —Jennifer Acosta Scott

GOOGLEDY-GOOK

What's a cook to do with the most fine net of a fat person?

Google is a wonderful tool, capable of doing many things, but there are still some tasks that it apparently cannot perform reliably—translating from one language to another, for instance.

That became abundantly clear to me one day when I was Googling information on Italian cuts of beef. I got some likely-sounding results, most of them in Italian. Though I can read the language well enough, I was intrigued by a link alongside several entries that said, "Translate this page." The devil made me hit it.

Boy, was I ever glad I did. Had I not, I might have gone through life not realizing that "[t]he meat of ox of good quality comes characterized especially from the fat person" or that "[a] good coast must not only have a wide covering of a fat leggermente rosato white man, but most fine net of fat person must have the meat like marmorizzata one". Those Italians! Can't they just

make anything sound delicious!

Of course, I thought, it may be that Google never got good grades in Italian. Maybe it did better with French. I looked up the first traditional French specialty that came to mind, *oeufs en*



meurette, to see what Monsieur Google would have to say. I didn't get very far. The first recipe he translated began with this note: "A small council while passing... have the well hung liver—it is not a receipt for child!" That scared me off for several reasons.

Another recipe called for "carrots out of discs, onions chopped, peeled garlic, grass, salt, pepper and sugar" (Alice B. Toklas, are you there?) and instructed me, after "letting the liquid quiver", to "pass the juice to Chinese". I say let the Chinese get his own juice, you know?

But Google must be able to translate something, I figured. What kind of a name was Google, anyway? Hmm...sounded German. So I gave sauerbraten—or "Rheini sour roast", as they call it in Googleberg—a whirl. Well, the ingredients list sounded straightforward enough, including such staples as "1 litre Wine, red, drying; and 2 kg Beef, lean cattle scorching roast (original with horse scorching roasts)". The instructions were a bit more challenging. I'd be following along just fine and then stumble on something like "Fill best the meat with the Marinade into a large plastic bag, air squeeze out and weld!" By the time I got to the end and the part that read, "Degree of difficulty: pffiffig," all I could think was Sure, Google, pffiffig. That's easy for you to say. —Colman Andrews

ONE GOOD BOTTLE

A minor blending grape in Bordeaux, malbec has become something of a star in Argentina. While 100 percent malbecs have their appeal, the grape seems to show particularly nicely as a major blending grape—as in ACHAVAL FERRER QUIMERA 2003 (\$38), a mix



of old-vine malbec (40 percent), merlot, and cabernet sauvignon with a touch of cabernet franc. The result is a dark purple wine of unexpected complexity, soft and well-structured, earthy but not overripe, and luscious with opulently rounded fruit. (See THE PANTRY, page 93, for a source.) —THE EDITORS