

SUMMER BOUNTY

Chicago chefs savor the final days of summer with fresh Midwestern produce

BY AMBER GIBSON

There's a time and place for hunks of meat off the grill, but it's possible to prepare just as satisfying a meal with vegetables. "Don't mess up what the Earth got right," says Cantina 1910 Chef Scott Shulman. "Restraint is your best ingredient in summer." Here, we highlight a few fresh favorites from local chefs, plus their tips for picking the best produce at the farmers markets so you can recreate the dishes at home. Healthy eating has never been so delicious.

Cantina 1910's sea bass ceviche

PHOTO BY GRANT KESSLER



RAW



"Summer is about freshness, vibrant colors and staying cool," Shulman says. He illustrates that philosophy with ceviches at Cantina 1910 (5025 N. Clark), dressing scallops with heirloom tomatoes, Morita peppers and salsa verde (\$17) and serving sea bass with sweet **blackberries** and peaches, ginger and tangy *jocoque*, a type of Mexican sour cream (\$15).

At the farmers market: Shulman recommends buying the darkest blackberries, as they'll be the sweetest.

For an intense **beet** tartare (\$10) at Green Zebra (1460 W. Chicago), sous chef Bill Walker ferments raw beets in a salt brine for two weeks, converting natural sugars into CO₂. "This helps break down some of the cellulose walls on the raw vegetable, making it much easier and pleasant to eat raw," he says. Walker then sets the finely diced ring of raw and roasted beets atop borscht yogurt and tops it with candied pistachios and raspberry powder. Though it's inspired by a meat dish, this type of tartare can be prepared vegan.

At the farmers market: "We're lucky that beets grow very easily in the Midwest," Walker says. "Look for firm beets with nice greens."



CHILLED SOUPS

At Salero (621 W. Randolph), Chef Ashlee Aubin adds sweet heirloom peppers to his gazpacho (\$10), marinating all the ingredients together with generous sherry vinegar, olive oil and salt to harmonize the flavors. "We only use the very ripest tomatoes," he says. "Especially ones that are too soft to use in salads."

At the farmers market: Heirloom tomatoes come in all shapes, colors and sizes, but Aubin recommends picking tomatoes that are full of color and aren't too squishy. "They should feel like a just-full water balloon," he says.



Chilled soups are a popular starter to cool off at NAHA (500 N. Clark). Chef Carrie Nahabedian serves daily specials (\$10) with unique flavors like black **plum** or **kohlrabi** (a relative of cabbage). The black plum soup is served with white corn and sweet garlic flan. "It's very floral, rich, tart and sweet," Nahabedian says. Her kohlrabi soup has a vegetable broth base and garnishes of wood-grilled tropea onions, tomato preserves and shaved purple kohlrabi.

At the farmers market: Nahabedian loves Methley and golden plums and recommends tasting anything you're not familiar with. She looks for firm, heavy and green kohlrabi. "At the market, kohlrabi tends to be much larger than at the store. It's a root vegetable, so it can be stored for weeks without a problem."



VEGGIE SIDES



A popular summer dish at Cafe Spiaggia (980 N. Michigan) is a medley of grilled zucchini, pattypan and summer **squash** with pecorino Romano, hazelnuts and tarragon (\$13). Chef de Cuisine Joe Flamm remembers chopping up squash from his mom's garden to throw on the grill as a kid. "This dish is just a slightly more refined version of a childhood favorite," he says.

At the farmers market: Flamm recommends picking out firmer squash and zucchini at the market. "They will soften perfectly on the grill."

"My favorite summer produce are all of the **greens**," says Formento's (925 W. Randolph) Executive Chef Stephen Wambach. "I'll saute greens like chard, spigarello, Lamb's Quarters and dandelion. And others are great raw — there's lemony purslane, peppery arugula and tender spinach." He serves vegetable-driven dishes prepared simply with olive oil to enjoy on the expansive patio with a glass of rosé. Charred snap peas with mint pesto (\$8) are a crowd favorite (see below), and he brightens up house-whipped ricotta (\$10) with summer vegetables.

At the farmers market: Wambach avoids overgrown greens, since they can be tough and woody. "Always look for stiff, vibrant stems and leaves with a good snap, and avoid any discoloration."



DESSERT

At Nico Osteria (1015 N. Rush), **peaches** reign supreme with Pastry Chef Leigh Omilinsky's Calabrian-inspired pesche con crema (\$12). "Traditionally, the little cakes are filled with pastry cream," Omilinsky says. "But I fill mine with peach mousse."

At the farmers market: Omilinsky suggests smelling the peaches — the more aromatic, the more flavorful. "And talk to the farmer," she adds. "They can tell you how best to ripen the fruit at home."



Old Fashioned cocktails inspired the nostalgic mason jar dessert (\$12) Pastry Chef Ji Hyun Yoon serves at GreenRiver (259 E. Erie). She layers popped corn pan-

na cotta with pistachio cake cubes, caramel popcorn, fresh **cherries** and peppercorn cherry compote before finishing the treat with a scoop of orange bourbon ice cream. "It's super convenient to build desserts in mason jars a day or so in advance for picnics," she says. "Just top with ice cream right before serving."

At the farmers market: Yoon avoids cherries that are too soft and says color is key. "For black cherries, the darker the better. Bing cherries should be yellow with a hint of blushing red. Tart or sour pie cherries should be ruby red in color."



CHARRED SNAP PEAS WITH MINT PESTO

Serves 4

MINT PESTO (yields 1 cup)

- 1 cup packed mint
- 1 cup packed basil
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons Marcona almonds
- 1 clove garlic
- ¼ cup Parmesan, grated salt and pepper
- Blanch herbs in and out of

boiling water. Shock with cold water, squeeze out excess water and then rough chop.

Place in blender with rest of ingredients except Parmesan, and blend on high until smooth.

Cool in an ice bath. Add cheese and check seasoning.

SNAP PEAS

- 1½ pounds snap peas
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar

20 small mint leaves

¼ cup toasted Marcona almonds

Clean peas and toss in olive oil with salt and pepper. Place wire rack on grill and cook snaps until charred but still crunchy. Toss with the vinegar and oil, check seasoning, add mint and almonds.

Make a bed of the pesto on 4 plates, place snap pea salad on top and serve.