



## Edible Paradise: Fresh Picks at the Market

By Andrew Cohen, MBCFM Chef In Residence

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■ **Featured Produce:** *Apples, Figs, Stonefruit*

■ **Recipes:** *Vanilla Caprese Fantasia*

Although it is still technically summer, I can feel autumn coming on already. There are some signs of it at the market as well. This is peak summer season, but also a time of transition, with some fruits making their annual, very brief, appearances. Look for Pink Pearl apples at Prevedelli and Mello-Dy. These apples seem to come and go in a three-week span, but are worth looking for. Crisp, tart with a sweet edge to them, they are pink all the way through. I have found that the ones with a pronounced blush and more caramel on the skins have more sweetness, though they are still tart overall. These apples make a beautiful addition to a salad of assertive greens such as frisee and escarole dressed with balsamic and one of the olive oils from the market. Scatter in some almonds and you have a pretty and tasty salad.

Apples in general are moving into the market as the stonefruit season starts to wane. Eat up those nectarines, plums, and peaches, as they will disappear in the next six to eight weeks. Many of the early apples are crisp and tart, and these are great for cooking. Desserts are great, but I like to sauté pork chops and add in some wedges of apples such as Gravensteins or the Pink Pearls, and make a sauce with shallots, thyme, a touch of brandy, and some apple juice or stock. Try this with the organic pork from Old Creek Ranch; you can find all the other things you need for the recipe at the market, too. A variation could be done with the cipollini onions from Pinnacle Farms, apples, some white wine, escarole, and some Bavarian sausages from Corralitos Meats.

### TUSCAN FARE

To further enjoy the last days of summer, eating outside is perfect. Now is the right time for preparing foods from the Mediterranean to eat out on the deck, fairly simple things with big flavors that can be eaten at room temperature or cool. Salade Nicoise, a combination of vegetables and canned tuna can be updated by getting some fresh tuna from H&H Fresh Fish and searing it, then chilling it and slicing over a

salad of soft greens with tomatoes, bell peppers, blanched and chilled haricot vert, paper thin slices of fennel (or not) and sliced steamed fingerling potatoes. A nice unfussy dish with all the components of a full meal to enjoy outside. It's also the perfect time for ratatouille (no, not the movie!), a braise of zucchini, peppers, eggplant, onions, and tomatoes. This dish, when well made, is a great, and versatile, dish that can be served warm, room temperature, or even cold. I use it as a side, a topping for pasta or pizza, in omelets, for hors d'oeuvres on toasts, and as part of a sandwich. All the ingredients for this dish are at their peak at market right now.

Figs are in right now, and there are many ways I like them. Of course, some are eaten straight on the way to the car, but they are good with a little crème fraîche spooned on for breakfast. A classic first course is to wrap them with some prosciutto and serve with arugula and a drizzle of balsamic vinegar and olive oil. You can also wrap them and quickly grill them, then dress and serve them. Use them in a braise of chicken with a Rhone style red wine for an intensely flavored, aromatic sauce. If you have some that are really ripe and sugary, get them really cold, then cut part way through them into quarters, and use a household butane or propane torch to brulee the cut surfaces. They will caramelize as a crème brulee does, without the fat and extra calories. If you wish, put a little vanilla, or orange flower or rose water, or mint extract, into some crème fraiche or lowfat yogurt for a topping. The contrast of hot and cold, sweet and tart, crisp and soft, is really a sensual treat.

Many of the vendors are bringing jams, vinegars, and spreads made from their produce to market. Take the time to check these out, and think outside of toast. These jams can be used to glaze, as sauce bases, and as components in vinaigrettes. It's a great way to add versatility and ease to meals, and still patronize the farmers at our markets.

I recently went to dinner at Bouchee in Carmel. While there I had an appetizer that we all liked. Of course, I had to play with it. Much of what I did consisted of "turning up" the flavors. This consisted of cutting the components smaller so you can taste them all at once, enjoying the contrasts, and turning up the volume on the individual

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flavors. The salad is a form of a Caprese. Here's my riff on that salad.

#### **VANILLA CAPRESE FANTASIA**

*1 teaspoon vanilla paste\**

*1 tablespoon grapeseed oil*

*2 cups heirloom tomatoes*

*6 ounces fresh Buffalo mozzarella*

*1/3-1/2 cup New Natives micro greens*

*1 tablespoon fruity extra virgin olive oil*

*1 large pinch of Maldon salt or other large flake salt*

*Fresh ground pepper to taste*

*1/2 firm sweet nectarine, such as a Son of Ugly*

- (1) Blend vanilla paste and oil in small bowl; set aside.
- (2) Cut tomatoes into 1/2 inch dice, removing seeds and very wet bits--OR--use a very sharp knife to cut "petals" from the outside of the tomato, then cut into 1/2 inch squares. Drizzle lightly with the vanilla oil and toss lightly.
- (3) Use fingers to shred cheese along the grain into pieces around the size of the tomatoes. Drizzle with the olive oil, tossing to coat evenly.
- (4) Use the sharpest knife you have to shave thin slices from the nectarine.
- (5) Toss tomatoes and cheese together. Add the sprouts and gently toss to mix in.
- (6) Very gently, mix in half the nectarine slices. Swirl in the bowl to "dress" everything, and taste for balance. You might want to drizzle in a little more of the vanilla oil.
- (7) Put salad into chilled individual serving bowls, making sure nectarines are evenly distributed, then sprinkle the rest of the nectarine over the salads.
- (8) Sprinkle lightly with fresh pepper and salt. Serve immediately.

It may sound odd, but trust me, it works. Just watch out for the vanilla--not too much or you'll overwhelm the other tastes. This salad points out the fruit elements of tomatoes, and goes well with champagne.

\*You can purchase vanilla paste from [www.vanilla.com](http://www.vanilla.com).