



FRANCISCAN KITCHEN NOTES

FALL 2009

EGGPLANT: NOT JUST PURPLE ANYMORE

Did you know that the eggplant is a relative of tomatoes, potatoes and tobacco? Belonging to the Nightshade family of plants, eggplants come in all shapes and sizes: large and deep purple (Classic), long and thin (Japanese), tiny and white (Easter Egg), and even multi-colored (Rosa Bianca). It is easy to grow, only needing sunshine and warm conditions to thrive.

A native to India, eggplant has often been dismissed as only good when breaded, fried, and drenched in tomato sauce and mozzarella. However, at least in Franciscan's Kitchen, eggplant often takes center stage. Due to its large quantity of glutamates (which give savory flavors), and its substantial texture, eggplant can often be substituted for meat in recipes. To add flavor to a vegetable ragout, eggplant can be sliced, diced and sautéed. Roasted or grilled eggplant develops intense flavors, while the sugars caramelize to provide texture. The rich flavors that result increase the fruit's versatility, allowing a variety of wine combinations.

As the fall weather creeps in, we are getting a great selection of different varieties from Farmer Jon. Tod has picked one of our favorites, Fairy Tale Eggplant, in his recipe this season. This eggplant is smaller and can be less bitter than the larger varieties. But don't worry if you can't find Fairy Tale eggplant; you can substitute your locally available varieties into Tod's recipe, it will taste delicious either way!

MEET THE VENDOR: FARMER JON

He just may be the Napa Valley's best kept secret. On just a few acres on the fertile Oakville bench, plus his (very large) front and back yards hidden away in Downtown Napa, Farmer Jon grows produce just for us— talk about farm to table! In his organically and sustainably grown gardens, Farmer Jon spends his days tending to a wide range of heirloom vegetables and fruits. Franciscan Winery is one of the few wineries lucky enough to receive such amazing, fresh produce. Early in the morning, Farmer Jon harvests the days crop and delivers it personally to Chef Tod, who then gets to make the important decision of what to do with it!

Farmer Jon understands the need for fresh, responsibly farmed, and local produce. For years, he was a chef to a number of Napa Valley's most discriminating palates. But throughout his career in the Kitchen, Jon's true love was the gardens which provided him with his produce. Over the years, as he continued to cultivate his home garden and began to provide for more and more local restaurants, his demand outgrew his land! So, a few years ago, Farmer Jon expanded his "operation" to include a few acres in the heart of the Oakville district. He figured if wine grapes do so well out there, surely tomatoes, herbs (and, yes, eggplant), would love it, too!

To us, this means that we can provide our guests with the very best, and very freshest, ingredients when they dine at Franciscan. Only then can the food we serve stand up to the wines into which we put every bit as much care as Jon does to his gardens!

FROM THE DESK OF TOD KAWACHI: GRILLED FARMER JON FAIRY TALE EGGPLANT, PIQUILLO PEPPER, ST. GEORGE CHEESE

6 ea Fairy Tale Eggplant (can sub small eggplant)
1 t Chopped garlic
1 t Chopped fresh rosemary
4 T Extra virgin olive oil
Sea salt and black pepper to taste
1 T Chopped Spanish piquillo peppers (can sub roasted red bell peppers)
6 oz. Matos St. George Cheese
1 lemon
6 T breadcrumbs

Trim the stem off eggplant and cut longwise in half, season with sea salt, black pepper, garlic, olive oil & chopped rosemary. Grill, cut side down, over medium-high heat for about 1 minute, turn 45 degrees and grill for another minute. Turn over to grill the skin side for 1 minute, then remove and set aside to cool.

Fine grate Matos St. George Cheese and sprinkle a layer over the eggplant halves, then top with the chopped peppers.

Moisten the bread crumbs with a little olive oil, sprinkle over the top of the eggplant and broil for 1-2 minutes until hot, melted and golden browned. Add a squeeze of fresh lemon juice over the top, and serve as an appetizer, or as a side dish with lamb, and a bottle of Franciscan Merlot.

FEATURED WINE: 2005 FRANCISCAN MERLOT

As the days are getting shorter (and the nights a little cooler) we at Franciscan have been drinking more and more of our delicious red wines, especially the Franciscan Merlot. We grow our Merlot fruit in the cooler area of Napa Valley, primarily Yountville and south. Cooler vineyards create deeper color, more vibrant flavors, and denser structure. Small lot winemaking finishes the process that Nature started, creating a vibrant and rich wine with supple structure.

The wine's aroma is rich with layers of black plum and currants, vanilla, sage and peppercorn, and sweet notes of toasty oak. Its full-bodied palate, vibrant dark cherry fruit, sweet herbs and silky mouth-feel beckon you back for just one more sip. It is very supple and elegant, the finely knit tannins highlighting bold fruit and sweet tobacco notes, giving a velvety finish. What a perfect wine to help usher in the new Fall season. Open a bottle tonight to enjoy with the recipe Tod created and enjoy the bounties of harvest!