



A monthly publication for members of the Olympia Food Co-op and its surrounding communities

September 2019

Tomatoes!

There is no vegetable so famous for being best freshly harvested as a tomato. Out of season tomatoes are often pale, grainy, and flavorless, but an in season, locally grown tomato is richly colored, dense, juicy, and unbelievably flavorful. Unfortunately, tomatoes, native to South America and likely domesticated in Mexico, are a sub-tropical to tropical fruit, and the cool weather of the Pacific Northwest gives us a very small window in which we can enjoy them locally grown. Luckily, advances in plant breeding and season extension have made that window larger, and September is a perfect time to enjoy fresh, local tomatoes here in the Northwest. September's mix of cool and hot days gives tomatoes a chance to shine in both raw and cooked dishes, and the bounty of other local vegetables and herbs gives us plenty of delicious ingredients to pair them with. ■



Tomatoes!

Caprese Salad

Fast and refreshing, this is the perfect lunch for a hot afternoon. For every 1-2 servings you want slice 1 **beefsteak-type tomato** (I think the big lumpy green ones usually have the best flavor around here) crosswise in 1/4 inch slices. For each tomato, slice 1 ball **fresh mozzarella** (cow or buffalo are both fine, you can also use burrata) into 1/4 thick rounds. Rinse and pat dry a bunch of **Italian-type basil** (thai basil feels a little too medicinal

line. Drizzle with **olive oil** and **balsamic vinegar** and sprinkle with **salt and fresh-cracked black pepper** to taste. ■

for this dish and the smaller leaves make for a less dramatic presentation). You may need more for a larger salad. Layer ingredients with a leaf (or two if they are small) of basil between each tomato and mozzarella slice forming a wheel or



continued on back



continued from front



Caprese Salad

Ratatouille

I wait all year for the right time to make ratatouille when all the ingredients are in season and available locally at the very end of summer. There are a ton of different ways to make this dish, which originates from the Provence region of France, but all of them are strongly herbed blends of eggplant, tomatoes, summer squash, peppers, and onions cooked with a generous amount of olive oil. If you're up for a serious food project and want something real fancy looking to impress with, give Julia Child's classic recipe a try. In her recipe, each vegetable is cooked separately and then layered much like a caprese salad. The way I was taught to cook it though (and enjoy it best) is much more rustic and simple with all the vegetables stewed together and coming out looking almost like a pasta sauce.

To start, slice one large or two medium **eggplant** into 1/4-inch slices and salt- set aside in a colander to drain. The window for local eggplant- which require more time and heat to grow than pretty much any other vegetable- is short, so snatch them up as soon as you see them. Begin heating 1/4 inch of **olive oil** in a deep, heavy bottomed skillet on medium-low to medium heat. Cube one or two large **sweet onions** (local sweet onions should start rolling in soon!) into 1/2 inch pieces. Add to hot oil. Peel and crush about 1/2 a head of **garlic** (there's a ton of heirloom garlics available this time of year to experiment with- Music is a favorite of many Co-op staff) and add to the pot. While onion and garlic cook, pat dry your eggplant. Add eggplant to the pot- if it absorbs all your oil add a tablespoon or two more. While eggplant gently sautés, slice 2-3 **sweet or green peppers** into 1/4 inch slices. My favorite choices for peppers this time of year are local bullhorn type peppers or green bell peppers from Stewart Organics (I don't know what it is but I adore their green bell peppers). Add to the pot and sprinkle with salt. Now slice 2-3 **zucchini or other summer**

squash into 1/4 slices- get whatever local summer squash is available to you. I prefer a butterstick or yellow crookneck for color. Add to the pot and salt lightly. Chop up a mix of **fresh Mediterranean herbs**. I use whatever I have- this could include thyme, rosemary, oregano, marjoram, basil, savory, parsley, fennel, lavender, bay, and/or tarragon. Be careful not to add more than a couple of sprigs of rosemary, lavender, or oregano or more than one bay leaf all of which can impart a medicinal taste, but you can go wild with thyme, basil, and parsley. You want 2-3 tablespoons of your herb blend. Add this to the pot, and now dice 2-3 **heirloom tomatoes** (choose really ripe and juicy ones) and add the pot, salting lightly. Add more oil to the pot if anything is sticking (or if you just love olive oil) and cook, stirring occasionally, until everything is very soft- this takes 20-30 minutes. Add **salt and pepper** to taste before serving. Ratatouille is best served room temperature to warm, topped with a **sharp, hard cheese** like parmesan, romano, or pecorino, with **crusty bread** to sop it up or long grain rice cooked in a little bouillon if you're off bread. ■



Vegatables for Ratatouille

-Sylvan, OFC Garden Manager