

THE GRUB HUNTER



Gary Ibsen, right, and Dagma Lacey showing off some of the bounty of their tomato harvest.

COURTESY GARY IBSEN

Seeds of a life and a love story

"I am but a grower of tomatoes bearing gifts of seeds.

Every seed a possibility?"

— Gary Ibsen
Wedded to the soil and to the seasonal ebb and flow of life, Gary Ibsen and his wife Dagma Lacey live out a

tender love story on the coast of Mendocino.

The two tend the land, calloused hand in calloused hand, and revel in an annual tomato harvest that sustains them in mind, body and spirit. Together they have built a tomato lover's paradise they call TomatoFest (www.tomatofest.com).

"All of what I do and am is a love story," said Ibsen, 74, who started the now-defunct fall ritual called the Carmel TomatoFest. "I could never have imagined in my younger years that this time of my life would be the best of my life."

Health issues provide ongoing physical pain and daily challenges, but the ever-optimistic Ibsen keeps plowing along because that's nothing "compared to the quality of life and love I am fortunate enough to enjoy with my wife and partner."

Ibsen and Lacey left Carmel in 2008 for the coast of Mendocino, and have grown and changed the business dramati-

cally in 10 years. They appeared on my radar last week through a press release announcing the propagation of a new tomato named in honor of the late storyteller Anthony Bourdain.

Tomato breeder and Ibsen friend Jeff Dawson came up with the heart-shaped fruit by crossing between Sungold and Amish Paste. This cross yielded the Amish Red which over time threw off a slicer (Red Buddha) and ultimately a red oxheart. After seven years of stabilization, it has produced 1-pound fruit with "a particularly bold, fruity-sweet flavors and good acidity for perfect balance."

Ibsen adored Bourdain and his life exploring world cultures through the lens of food.

"He was an icon to me, and many others, who love food and cooking as a most enjoyable way of gathering people together to celebrate our humanity," Ibsen said. "We wanted to pay tribute by naming a tomato after him, a tomato heretofore unknown."

The Bourdain tomato became part of the harvest this fall. On any given day the couple can collect more than 2,500 pounds of various tomatoes from often muddy fields. Then they return to their kitchen with some of their bounty "creating different colored sauces and soups to offer ourselves and loved ones, the nourishment and delight of summertime flavors during the

cooler seasons," Ibsen said.

But the fruit of their labor contains another treasure. For Ibsen and Lacey, the magic begins and ends with the seeds. To them, it's like panning for gold.

This year they grew more than 600 varieties from certified organic heirloom tomato seeds, many of which were originally sourced from family farms around the world.

Using natural fermentation, they fill 120 5-gallon buckets with crushed tomato pulp, juice and seeds, rinsing away unwanted solids. They pour off the seeds into a kitchen strainer, pressing out remaining water and dumping the seeds into pans for several days of stirring and drying. Then they weigh and package the seeds by variety to store in their treasured TomatoFest Seed Bank.

Ibsen delights in the countless stories shared by families from far-flung corners of the world. They rejoice in passing down "heirloom" seeds through generations, and many of those seeds fall into the hands of Ibsen and Lacey.

"We sincerely love what we do," said Ibsen, author of "The Great Tomato Book." "We remain advocates of protecting the diversity of tomato varieties, especially in this time when small family farms are closing or being bought out by large corporate farms that have little

interest in maintaining the varieties that have been treasured for generations."

Ibsen rises each day at 4 a.m. to personally respond to hundreds of emails, answering questions from tomato growers around the world.

One such correspondence came from Karen Teets of West Virginia. "She told me the variety was grown by Homer Fike as long as his 78-year-old daughter could remember," Ibsen said. "Beyond that, no one is alive ... to remember."

Teets sent Ibsen and Lacey some seeds. Last year Ibsen received another note from one of Fike's 28 grandchildren, Connie Fint from Aurora, West Virginia, who said that her 88-year-old mother Eloise is now growing that variety, and during harvest "always has them lined up on her back porch."

The abundance of Homer Fike's distinctively yellow-gold, heart-shaped fruit (meaty flesh, delicious sweet flavor) has been one of Ibsen's greatest tomato pleasures.

That's saying something. Tomato growers from around the world send Ibsen tomato seeds that have been handed down for generations. "It became our mission to protect these tomato varieties and the family stories that accompanied them from disappearing," he said.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT



CONTRIBUTED — LISA HUBBARD FOR EPICURIUS

Easy-peasy strategies to eliminate 500 calories a day

I know, I know. You've gained more weight than you'd planned this month. It's the same song, but



Donna Maurillo

a different year. We've cooked and baked and celebrated ourselves into a food coma. And we still have New Year's Eve coming up.

How can we lose that weight quickly? Here are a few easy-peasy strategies that eliminate about 500 calories a day, which means you can expect to lose a pound each week. Increase your exercise at the same time, and you can double that.

▪ Cut back on fruit juice. It has lots of sugar and almost no fiber. Eat an orange instead. If you really want juice, dilute it with water or club soda.

▪ If you're addicted to candy, skip the milk chocolate and go for the dark stuff. It has much less sugar and more beneficial flavonoids.

▪ Skip the butter on your toast and replace it with a bit of mashed avocado or banana. Forego the bagel, and switch to whole-wheat toast.

▪ Instead of rice, cook up some cauliflower rice. You'll eat far fewer carbs and gain more healthful fiber and vitamins. Use it in soups, salads, tacos, and other dishes that call for rice.

▪ Enjoy at least one yummy salad a day, and pack it with shredded vegetables. Serve dressing on the side, or drizzle it instead of pouring or lading. Just one tablespoon of dressing is about 100 calories!

▪ Tell the restaurant server not to bring bread or chips to the table. It means the butter and olive oil will be unnecessary, too.

▪ At 150 calories per can, give up sodas. Even diet sodas have artificial sweeteners that actually make you gain weight! If you must have a fizzy drink, try club soda.

▪ Eat pasta as a side dish, not as an entrée. Marinara sauce is fine. Cream sauces are not. Toss with a little olive oil and sprinkle with herbs. Serve with fish or chicken and fresh vegetables.

▪ If you like to cook enough for tonight's dinner and tomorrow's lunch, refrigerate the extra portions before you sit down to dinner. You won't be tempted to finish them off tonight.

▪ Imagine what you want to be. Are you a drippy bacon double cheeseburger with greasy fries? Or are you a bright grilled salmon filet with herbed quinoa pilaf? Make your choice.

Don't do this

Don't beat up on yourself. You indulged. So what? If you gained the weight quickly, you can lose it quickly. Don't jump into intense exercise. You'll only get discouraged. Ramp up with an extra five or ten minutes each day.

MAURILLO » PAGE 5

FARM TO TABLE

Celery root is at its peak this time of year

By Catherine Barr

You'll find celery root at the farmers market year round, but it's best at this time of year. It is usually sold without the celery-looking stalks on the top, but if it is, throw the stalks in soups or chop them up for salads. Most of the US supply of celery root is grown in California. It takes about 200 days for celery root to grow.

Celery root (also known as celeriac) has been around since the Middle Ages. It's an integral part of French cooking and used in stews, casseroles and gratins as

well as salads. Celery root made its appearance in the US about the 19th century. As Americans, we tend to shy away from celery root, maybe because we really don't know with to do with the brown knobby mass! However, it's simple — scrub it, peel it, and place it in milk or water with a little lemon juice so it doesn't turn brown, and then use it like you would turnips or rutabagas. It's also a great non-starch alternative to mashed potatoes.

How to Select: No getting around it, this root vegetable is ugly. Look for firm brown colored roots. It will be knobby, but that does not affect what's inside.

Celery Root, Potato and Apple Purée

INGREDIENTS

1 pound Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into large pieces
2 large celery roots, about 2 pounds, peeled and cut into large pieces
1 large or 2 small tart apples, such as a Granny Smith, peeled, cored and quartered
1/2 cup, approximately, warm milk or broth from the celery root
2 tablespoons butter or walnut oil (or a combination)
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Place the potatoes in one saucepan and the celery root and apples in another. Cover with water. Add salt to taste to each, about 1 teaspoon. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer until tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

Drain the potatoes, and return to the pot. Cover tightly, and allow potatoes to sit for five minutes to steam and dry out.

Drain the celery root and apples through a strainer set over a bowl. Purée potatoes, celery root, and apples using a food mill or a potato ricer into one large bowl. Whisk in the milk or the broth

until the mixture is fluffy. Add the butter or walnut oil to the hot purée, stir until the butter melts, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

YIELD: Serves 6.

Farm to Table is a weekly feature by Catherine Barr, executive director of the Monterey Bay Certified Farmers Markets. For locations and vendor information, visit www.montereybayfarmers.org. For more seasonal cooking recipes and tips, see www.edibleparadise.com.

ON NUTRITION

New views on nutrition

Let the celebrations continue...at least until the clock strikes midnight on Dec. 31. That's when grocery shopping quickly turns from eggnog and butter to

Barbara Quinn

salads and water. Not surprising, the top resolutions on Jan. 1 are aimed at getting back into shape. There is a difference, however, between a resolve and a goal, say experts. A resolution is a wish, such as "I am going to lose 20 pounds" or "I want to get more exercise." A goal outlines the concrete day-to-day steps we plan to take to make those wishes come true.

Behavior experts tell us to make SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable (Attainable), Relevant and Time-bound. If my resolution is to lose weight, for example, a smart goal might be "I will write down everything I eat and drink for one week." By the way, this is one of the most effective weight loss strategies ever invented.

New research also urges us to make sleep a priority in this new year. The brain's ability to make good decisions about food is interrupted after just one night of disturbed sleep, say experts. One goal might be to be in bed with at least 8 hours before you have to wake up.

We may also need to rethink or change our goals as the new year emerges. For example, after years of cutting out full fat versions of cheese, milk and yogurt due to their saturated fat content, some studies suggest we might not need to be so vigilant. Well-respected publications such as the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition and the American Heart

Association's Circulation have found that particular types of fats in dairy foods were not associated with heart disease or other causes of death. One type of saturated fat in dairy called (don't try to pronounce this on your own, boys and girls) "heptadecanoic acid" is associated with a lower risk of stroke, for instance. Other investigations report a lower incidence of diabetes and heart disease in people who consume full-fat dairy foods.

How can this be? Perhaps the unique combination of fats in dairy foods afford some possible health benefit, say some experts. Conjugated linoleic acid or CLA, for example, is a naturally occurring fat in dairy foods that has been found to slow the progression of heart disease.

Other research suggests that the combination of nutrients in dairy, including calcium, vitamin D and potassium may also contribute to these new-found health benefits.

Careful with portions, however, say nutrition experts. One cup of full fat yogurt can contain more than double the number of calories compared to lower fat versions. One reasonable goal then, would be to aim for no more than 3 servings of dairy foods a day. One serving equals 1 cup or 8 ounces of milk or yogurt, or 1 1/2 ounces of cheese.

May your goals lead you to a healthful and happy New Year.

Barbara Quinn is a registered dietitian nutritionist affiliated with the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula. She is the author of Quinn-Essential Nutrition: The Uncomplicated Science of Nutrition. Email her at barbara@quinessentialnutrition.com.

A CLASSIC

Make a stress-free chicken pot pie with only one pot

By America's Test Kitchen

The delights of classic chicken pot pie are many — from the burnished, flaky crust to the luscious, savory filling.

But putting it together can be a chore: Between making pie dough (which often requires pulling out a food processor), poaching chicken in one pot and building a gravy in another, and then transferring the filling and crust to a pie plate to bake, this comfort food requires a major time commitment, not to mention a battery of pots and pans.

We wanted an easier way and found our trusty Dutch oven to be just the ticket to get us there using only one pot.

Boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into pieces, were easy to work with and stayed moist through cooking. While tasters liked the deeper flavor provided by browning the chicken, they weren't keen on the crusty, browned exterior on the pieces it didn't jive with the luxurious, creamy filling.

Instead, we simply stirred bite-size pieces of chicken right into the gravy and turned to two powerhouse ingredients: tomato paste and soy sauce to boost savoriness without being distinguishable in their own right.

To give our pot pie fresh spring flavor we swapped in leeks for onions and stirred in some fresh asparagus, peas, and tarragon after pulling the pot from the oven.

With our one-pot filling perfected, we turned to the crust. Instead of labor-intensive home-made pastry, we decided to use buttery store-bought puff pastry and wove it into a simple but stunning lattice. But no matter what we tried, baking the crust on top of the filling inevitably led to sorry, soggy results.

In the past we skirted



CARL TREMBLAY — AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN

A Dutch oven is the ticket for using only one pot in this recipe.

this problem by baking the crust separately on a baking sheet, but we were hesitant to add more dishes to our recipe. We realized, however, that the lid of the Dutch oven could act as a stand-in baking sheet: We simply turned the lid upside down before covering the pot and baked the pastry on top. A simple egg wash turned the crust a deep golden. Once we slid the baked crust onto the filling, our simplified centerpiece was complete.

To thaw frozen puff pastry, let it sit either in the refrigerator for 24 hours or on the counter for 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Chicken Pot Pie With Spring Vegetables

Servings: 6

Start to finish: 1 hour, 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

1 (9 1/2-by-9-inch) sheet puff pastry, thawed
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 pound leeks, white and light green parts only, halved lengthwise, cut into 1/2 inch pieces, and washed thoroughly
4 carrots, peeled and cut into 1/2 inch pieces
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
4 garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon tomato paste
3 cups chicken broth, plus extra as needed
1/4 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon soy sauce
2 bay leaves
2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into 1 inch pieces
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1 pound asparagus, trimmed and cut on bias into 1 inch lengths
1 cup frozen peas
2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon or parsley
1 tablespoon grated lemon zest plus 2 teaspoons juice

DIRECTIONS

Cut sheet of parchment paper to match outline of Dutch oven lid and place on large plate or upturned rimmed baking sheet. Roll puff pastry sheet into 15-by-11-inch rectangle on lightly floured counter. Using pizza cutter or sharp knife, cut pastry widthwise into ten 1 1/2 inch-wide strips. Space 5 pastry strips parallel and evenly across parchment circle. Fold back first, third, and fifth strips almost completely. Lay additional pastry strip perpendicular to second and fourth strips, keeping it snug to folded edges of pastry, then unfold strips. Repeat laying remaining 4 pastry strips evenly across parchment circle,

alternating between folding back second and fourth strips and first, third, and fifth strips to create lattice pattern. Using pizza cutter, trim edges of pastry following outline of parchment circle. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and refrigerate while preparing filling.

Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 400F. Melt butter in Dutch oven over medium heat. Add leeks, carrots, and 1 teaspoon salt and cook until vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in flour, garlic, and tomato paste and cook for 1 minute.

Slowly stir in broth, scraping up any browned bits and smoothing out any lumps. Stir in cream, soy sauce, and bay leaves. Bring to simmer and cook until mixture is thickened, about 3 minutes. Stir in chicken and return to simmer.

Off heat, cover pot with inverted lid and carefully place parchment with pastry on lid. Brush pastry with egg and sprinkle with salt. Transfer pot to oven and bake until pastry is puffed and golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating pot halfway through baking.

Remove pot from oven. Transfer parchment with pastry to wire rack; discard parchment. Remove lid and discard bay leaves. Stir asparagus into filling and cook over medium heat until crisp-tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Off heat, stir in peas and let sit until heated through, about 5 minutes. Adjust filling consistency with extra hot broth as needed. Stir in tarragon and lemon zest and juice. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set pastry on top of filling and serve.

Nutrition information per serving: 631 calories; 308 calories from fat; 34g fat (11g saturated); 0g trans fats; 212mg cholesterol; 768mg sodium; 40g carbohydrate; 5g fiber; 6g sugar; 40g protein.

Hale

FROM PAGE 4

Ibsen estimates that the current TomatoFest Seed Bank contains almost 1,000 varieties gathered over 20 years, making it the nation's largest organic collection.

Locals remember fondly the TomatoFest event, but Ibsen's roots go deeper. He once owned a popular Cajun/Creole restaurant in Carmel, was the founder and creator of Monterey Life magazine, served on the national board of directors of the American Institute of Wine & Food with Julia Child and Robert Mondavi, and co-founded the Monterey Bay Chapter of A.I.W.F. Together they have co-founded the World Tomato Society (www.worldtomatosociety.com), with a goal to unite tomato enthusiasts around the world.

The end of the TomatoFest event created a shift for the couple, who married late in life in 2006. The focus on growing and selling tomatoes changed to the collection and sale of seeds — and to growing as a couple.

They moved from Carmel to a forested piece of land in Mendocino, 3 miles off the ocean, to be closer to nature and their eight children and nine grandchildren. "We live



COURTESY GARY IBSEN

A new tomato named in honor of the late chef-storyteller Anthony Bourdain.

on a dirt road and have only the sounds of birds and other forest animals," Ibsen said. "In my 20s I had a dream of homesteading a piece of land. Our first two years here I seemed to have the chainsaw attached to my hip as I cleared patches of virgin forest for a variety of gardens."

Ibsen has reduced his physical workload due to multiple health challenges and age. "Lately, Dagma has supported my limitations by taking on much of the heavy lifting and endurance," he said. "It appears that this has only enhanced her strength and beauty."

And enhanced their ability to grow ... together.

Mike Hale can be reached at thegrubhunter@att.net. Listen to his weekly radio show "Food Fodder" at noon Wednesdays on KRML, 102.1 FM.

Maurillo

FROM PAGE 4

Don't go beyond your abilities. If a spin class sounds exhausting, take an exercise class with people at your fitness level. The Silver Sneakers class at Scotts Valley Toadal Fitness is ideal for me. Delfine is a wonderful instructor!

And don't give up. Healthful eating and getting fit should be a long-term goal. Do the things you enjoy, whether it's walking through the redwoods, riding a bike on the coast, running on a track, or using the stair-stepper while you watch TV. You can do it!

Chicken soup trick

I love my InstaPot, and I find more ways to use it. When I made chicken soup to treat my cold recently, I cooked chicken tenders in the pressure cooker with a few cups of broth. The pressure tenderizes the meat so well that it shreds almost before you pull it with a fork.

After shredding, I returned the chicken to the pot and used it in the slow cooker mode. Add herbs, minced garlic, turmeric, a lemon (skin and all), and cook for an hour. Then add rice and vegetables, cooking until the rice is almost done. It will

continue to absorb liquid to finish cooking.

Tip of the week

When freezing sauces, soups, purees, etc., freeze them flat in zippered plastic bags. They'll stack easily. And they'll freeze and thaw more quickly.

Recipe of the week

If you think a 500-calorie meal can't possibly be satisfying, try this recipe from Epicurious. This is a complete serving of fish, rice, and a vegetable.

Lime- and Honey-Glazed Salmon with Basmati and Broccolini

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup fresh lime juice
2 tablespoons finely grated lime peel
2 tablespoons honey
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro plus additional for sprinkling
4 teaspoons soy sauce

1 tablespoon olive oil
3/4 cup sliced shallots (about 3 large)
1 1/2 cups basmati rice (9 to 10 ounces)
3 1/4 cups (or more) low-salt chicken broth
4 skinless salmon fillets, about 5 to 6 ounces each
1 bunch broccolini, bottom inch trimmed, stalks separated if necessary
Lime wedges for serving, if desired

DIRECTIONS

1 Preheat oven to 450 degrees F: Whisk lime juice, lime peel, honey, 2 tablespoons cilantro, and soy sauce in small bowl. Set aside.
2 Heat oil in large deep ovenproof skillet or casserole (with lid) over medium-high heat: Add shallots and sauté until beginning to soften and brown, about 5 minutes. Stir in rice, then 3 1/4 cups broth. Bring to a boil.
3 Cover skillet tightly with lid: Place in the

oven and bake 10 minutes. Rice will be almost cooked through, and most of broth will be absorbed. Mix in more broth 1/4 cup at a time if it dries out.

4 Remove skillet from the oven: Sprinkle rice lightly with salt. Sprinkle salmon with salt and pepper. Arrange salmon on the rice, pressing it in lightly. Tuck broccolini in around fish, with stems anchored in the rice. Spoon 1 tablespoon lime mixture over each salmon fillet.

5 Cover skillet tightly and return it to the oven: Bake until salmon is just opaque in the center and broccolini is crisp-tender, 8 to 10 minutes. Drizzle remaining lime mixture over the fish and rice. Sprinkle with additional chopped cilantro. Serve from the skillet with lime wedges for squeezing, if desired.

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Celebrate the Season at Estéban Restaurant

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Four-Course Prix Fix Menu

Mon., December 31, 2018

5:00pm - 9:00pm

\$75 per person Children's menu available

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Readers' choice

MONTEREY HERALD 2018

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