



BROWN BAG LUNCH IN THE GARDEN

July 2, 2010—Swiss Chard

This Week's Recipe:

Swiss Chard & Sweet Potato Gratin

Serves 12

- 1/4 cup (1/2 stick or 2 ounces) butter
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 3 pounds Swiss chard, leaves and stems separated and both cut into 1-inch pieces
- Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
- 2 cups heavy cream or whole milk
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 2 pounds medium red-skinned sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/8-inch thick rounds
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh Italian parsley
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme
- Fine sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/4 cups (about 5 ounces) coarsely grated Swiss or Cheddar cheese

Prep greens: Cook onion in 2 tablespoons butter in a wide 8-quart heavy pot over moderately low heat, stirring, until softened. Add chard stems, pinch of nutmeg, and salt and pepper to taste and cook, stirring, until vegetables are tender but not browned, about 8 minutes. Increase heat to moderately high and add chard leaves by large handfuls, stirring, until all greens are wilted. Season with salt and pepper then transfer greens to a colander to drain well and press out liquid with back of a large spoon.

Make sauce: Combine cream or milk and garlic in small saucepan; bring to simmer; keep warm. Melt two tablespoons butter in a medium heavy saucepan over moderate heat and stir in flour. Cook roux, whisking, one minute, then slowly whisk in warm cream/milk and boil, whisking, one minute. Season sauce with salt and pepper.

Assemble gratin: Preheat oven to 400°F. Butter deep 9×13 baking dish. Spread half of sweet potatoes in the prepared baking dish. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, a quarter of the herbs and a 1/4 cup of the cheese. Distribute half of the greens mixture over the cheese, then sprinkle salt, pepper, a quarter of the herbs and 1/4 cup of the cheese over it. Pour half of bechamel sauce over the first two layers then continue with the remaining sweet potatoes, more salt, pepper, herbs and cheese and then the remaining greens, salt, pepper and herbs. Pour the remaining sauce over the top of the gratin, pressing the vegetables slightly to ensure that they are as submerged as possible. Sprinkle with the last 1/4 cup of cheese.

Bake gratin for about 1 hour until golden and bubbly, and most of the liquid is absorbed. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

Do ahead: You can make the entire gratin but not bake it up to a day in advance and keep it in the fridge. You can also make and bake the gratin and reheat it.

Other Points of Interest in the Garden This Week:

- 1st baby watermelon!
- Asian peppers—what to use them for?
- Raspberry disease—maybe Phytophthora Root Rot?

Harvesting & Storing Swiss Chard

- Regularly harvest oldest leaves/stalks
- Cut near the base of the plant
- Store in a plastic bag in refrigerator until ready to use.
- If cooking, cook stems first, then add leaves.

Coming Next Week—Cucumbers

July 2, 2010—Swiss Chard

Swiss Chard Salad with Walnuts & Blue Cheese and Orange Dressing

A big bunch (maybe 2 bunches) fresh Swiss Chard, leaves and part of stems sliced
1/4 cup olive oil
1/4 to 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
1/4 cup orange juice
2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
Dried cranberries or raisins
Walnuts
Salt and pepper
2-3 oz. of crumbled blue cheese

Whisk together oil, vinegar, orange juice, and brown sugar. Toss with chard, cranberries, walnuts, and blue cheese. Salt and pepper to taste.

Swiss Chard and Red Pepper Gratin

1 generous bunch Swiss chard or 2 smaller bunches (about 1 1/2 pounds)
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 red bell pepper, diced
2 plump garlic cloves, minced or pressed
Salt and freshly ground pepper
3 large eggs
1/2 cup low-fat milk
3 ounces Gruyère cheese, grated (3/4 cup)
1/2 cup Arborio rice, cooked
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves, or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
2 tablespoons fresh or dry breadcrumbs

1. Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil while you clean the chard. Fill a bowl with ice water. Strip the leaves from the stalks, but hold onto the stalks. Wash the leaves in several rinses of water. When the water comes to a boil add the chard leaves and blanch for about 1 minute, just until tender. Using a skimmer or slotted spoon, transfer them immediately to the ice water. Let sit for a few minutes, then drain, squeeze out the excess water and chop medium-fine.

2. Preheat the oven to 375° F. Brush a 2-quart baking or gratin dish with olive oil.

3. Trim both ends off the chard stalks, then dice. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large, heavy nonstick skillet over medium heat and add the onion. Cook, stirring, until tender, about 5 minutes. Add the diced chard stalks, diced red pepper, and 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring often, for 5 to 8 minutes, until the vegetables are just tender. Add the garlic, stir together for a minute or so, until the garlic is fragrant, and stir in the chard. Stir together for 30 seconds to a minute, just to blend the mixture and coat the chard with oil. Season with salt and pepper, and remove from the heat.

4. Beat the eggs and milk together in a bowl. Stir in the chard mixture, the cheese, rice and thyme. Stir together, taste and add more salt and pepper if desired. Transfer to the baking dish. Sprinkle the breadcrumbs over the top and drizzle on the remaining oil.

5. Bake 40 to 45 minutes, until firm and browned on the top. Remove from the heat and cool for at least 10 minutes before serving. You can serve this warm or at room temperature.

Yield: Serves 6