

## Recipes from a Tuscan Garden

These recipes are for the gardener who wants something fresh and appetizing at the end of the day. Most recipes for eggplant will work for zucchini, and vice-versa. Most recipes for one kind of greens will work for other leafy crops like raddichio, spinach, turnip tops, or mustard. Each will have a unique flavor, but the method is the same. Italy eats more vegetables than any country in Europe--and of more kinds. This is a sampling of homestyle techniques--authentic, simple, and thrifty.

### Poached Whole Zucchini with Lemon and Olive Oil

Makes a main-dish summer salad mixed with potatoes, onions and hard-cooked eggs (increase oil and lemon accordingly). Makes a great companion for grilled meat or fish. Warm, with grated parmesan, rosemary or basil, and less lemon, it's good with pasta or potatoes. Good to make ahead for quick meals all week, this is a great midsummer alternative to lettuce for salads. This treatment is used for quartered eggplant (tossed with balsamic vinegar and mint), for Romanesco Broccoli, and for many sorts of greens--endive, rapini, turnip greens, spinach, mustard--which are poached very briefly and then served cold as an appetizing first course salad.

2 lbs (5 or 6 small) zucchini (may add quartered florence fennel as well in fall)  
1 teaspoon salt  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 teaspoon finely shredded lemon zest (yellow part of peel only)  
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice (or more)

Rinse but do not trim zucchini. Add them to a large pan of boiling water. Simmer--gently so they don't break--for 20 minutes, testing near the end. A zucchini lifted with a spoon should droop slightly but not break. Remove them one by one to a colander or towel. Put on a plate and sprinkle with ½ teaspoon salt, rolling them a bit to salt them evenly. Cut into 3" pieces and quarter each piece lengthwise, placing them cut side up on a plate. Sprinkle on another ½ teaspoon salt. Drizzle with oil and scatter lemon zest. (You may add a grinding of pepper, some fresh rosemary, or a torn basil leaf.) The zucchini can sit absorbing the flavors for anywhere from a few minutes to a couple of days. Sprinkle with lemon juice just before serving.

### Skillet Endive or Kale (or Romano Beans are great this way)

Served with bread and a grating of cheese, this makes a meal in 10 minutes. Just coat the bottom of a heavy skillet with olive oil, throw in 2 or three finely sliced cloves of garlic (red pepper flakes if desired), and put on medium heat. When the garlic starts to sizzle, stir it around and throw in your greens, rinsed and coarsely chopped with some water clinging to them (add ½ c water for beans). Turn up the heat briefly while you stir the greens and they wilt. Turn the heat to low, put on the lid, and cook 5 minutes. (10 for green beans) Stir in 1 tsp vinegar or a squeeze of lemon if desired.

### Tuscan White Bean and Greens Soup

Soak 1 lb white beans overnight, drain, and boil with 4 qts water, 3 bay leaves, and ¼ cup olive oil until the beans are tender and the broth is reduced to about 3 qts. Add 1 ½ teasp salt. In a skillet, heat 3 Tblsp olive oil with 6 cloves garlic, sliced, 5 leaves sage, and ¼ tsp red pepper flakes. When garlic sizzles and starts to color, add 1 ladle of your bean broth, let bubble, and return to the pot with all of the oil and flavorings. Put in 1 lb chopped kale or endive, simmer until tender, and serve with a grating of parmesan. Potatoes, fennel slices and roasted or sautéed peppers make good additions.

Riccia Pancalieri Endive and Lacinato Kale are good in salad for those who like full-flavored greens. The kale is usually used at the baby stage for salad. Cooking tames the flavor.

### Roasting Vegetables

Roasting deepens and sweetens the flavor of vegetables, just as grilling meat makes the flavor deeper and more complex. Any vegetable can be tossed with oil and roasted in a hot oven until the edges brown. Try it with vegetables you thought you didn't like. Remember to cut into uniform pieces for even cooking, coat well with olive oil (It will still have less fat than fried, or served with butter), sprinkle with salt, and use a hot oven. Allow plenty of time, and check often for doneness-don't worry about having it hot at mealtime because roasted veg are often served room temperature. Time ranges from 15 minutes for asparagus to 1 ½ hours for large whole beets. Roasting Peppers is the best way to peel them while developing flavor. You can use the broiler of an oven, a barbeque grill, a dry griddle, or hold them on a fork over a gas flame. The idea is to expose the pepper to high heat for a brief period, so that the skin browns, or even blackens, and bubbles form under the skin. As this happens, turn the pepper over until all sides are done (don't worry about stubborn spots) Slip off the skins as they cool, or hold under running water, which seems to lift the skin off easily. This is easier than it sounds and the results are fantastic.

Roasted Eggplant and Tomatoes-a hot dish, salad, sandwich or pasta sauce

2 medium eggplants  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
3 cups Principe Borghese or other small grape or cherry tomatoes  
Seasonings: 3 tablespoons shredded basil leaves; ½ tsp  
salt, pepper to taste  
Optional: 2 tbsp each wine vinegar and oil, ½ c  
shredded fresh mozzarella, roast peppers

Preheat oven to 450. Trim eggplant and cut into approximately 1/2" cubes. Toss them with 2 Tbsp oil and ¼ teas salt. Line a baking sheet with parchment, and spread the eggplant on it as thinly as possible. Roast tomatoes whole with 1 Tbs oil in their own pan (peppers can be in there too). Bake the vegetables until soft, shriveled, and browned at the edges (30 min or more). While roasting, turn vegetables a couple of times, and rotate the trays for even baking. Once out of the oven, add basil, salt, and pepper. (And roasted peppers if desired.) For salad: cool on the trays, combine in a bowl with oil, vinegar, and cheese if desired. For hot dish or sauce serve immediately, with parmesan. For sandwich, serve hot or cold, with cheese or a sprinkle of vinegar. One or two people in a hurry could sauté a smaller amount in a pan: Start with raw chopped peppers, then eggplant. Stir often and add the tomatoes last. Roasted green beans and Tomatoes-as above

Roasted Winter Vegetables –

A sweet-savory fall and winter treat. Serves 6 or gives you some for a quick meal another day.

6 small or 3 large beets, peeled and cut into ½" thick wedges  
1 large or 2 small fennel "bulbs" (the swollen stem bases) cut into 2"x ½' matchsticks  
6 medium carrots (or parsnips, or a mixture), in slices or sticks  
2 large leeks cut into ½' thick rounds, or wedges of red onion  
2 cups winter squash, pumpkin, or sweet potato cut in ½'x 1' pieces  
4 small red or yellow or white potatoes-the firm types, not bakers, in small wedges  
Seasonings: 1 branch (1 tsp) rosemary; ½ tsp salt; pepper; 3-10 whole cloves garlic  
3 Tbsp olive oil

Preheat oven to 450, while you chop the vegetables. Toss with oil and about ½ tsp salt. Lay herbs in pan and

spread the vegetables over. If they are more than 1 ½ " deep, use a second pan. Check and stir every 20 min. until tender and browned at the edges but not burnt. Should take about an hour. May be cooked in the pan with a meat roast.