

An artist's palette

Bring fall colours to your table with beautiful bounty from local farms and markets

BY VALERIE MUTTON

After visiting some of the Lake Simcoe area's wonderful art studios, come home to a hearty dinner inspired by the colours of Nature. As the green of summer gives way to the vibrant reds, oranges and yellows of autumn, our appetites turn from salads to heartier fare. A delicious dinner of butternut squash soup and pork shish kebabs with fall vegetables is the perfect way to bring art to your table and satisfy your hungry guests.

Butternut Squash Soup

This tasty soup is as colourful as it is delicious, and can be made a day ahead. Be artistic with your garnishes, too. A little sprinkle of chives or purple basil adds a nice contrast. Or add a dollop of sour cream to the centre of the soup and use a skewer to fan the sour cream into a decorative shape.

1	butternut squash	1
	salt and pepper	
2 tbsp	olive oil	25 ml
½ cup	chopped onion	125 ml
2	cloves garlic	2
½ - 1 tsp	curry powder	2.5 - 5 ml
4 cups	chicken or vegetable broth	1 L

Preheat oven to 350 F (180 C). Split the squash in half lengthways and remove seeds. Rub 1 tbsp (15 ml) of olive oil and sprinkle salt and pepper onto surface. Bake in roasting pan for 45 minutes to an hour, or until soft. Let cool, then scoop cooked squash into a bowl.

While squash is cooking, add onion and garlic to a large soup pot. Sauté onion and garlic in remaining olive oil until soft, about five minutes. Add curry powder. Add broth and cooked squash. Cook over medium heat until heated through.

Transfer soup to blender and purée



for your palate

until smooth. Garnish as desired. Makes four servings.

For a sweeter variation, add a diced apple during cooking and replace ½ cup (125 ml) of broth with apple juice. Omit garlic and curry powder; replace with grated nutmeg to taste.

Pork Shish Kebabs

First, soak wooden skewers in warm water for a couple of hours, so that they won't smoke or burn on the grill. Then, pat dry with a towel and thread skewers alternately with cubed pork and vibrant chunks of green, red, yellow and orange peppers. For even more colour and variety, add red onion, cherry tomatoes and even pineapple to the skewers. Grill over medium heat until the pork is fully cooked, basting occasionally with your favourite barbecue sauce.

Saffron Rice

Saffron comes from the stigma of the crocus plant, and is often touted as being the world's most expensive spice. But a little goes a long way, and it is not expensive in small quantities. You can buy it in culinary shops and sometimes at a good bulk-food store. Cook 2 cups (500 ml) of basmati rice according to package directions, adding a few strands of saffron (about 1/8 tsp, or 5 ml) to the cooking water. The spice will brighten the rice to a beautiful autumn yellow and impart a subtle but exotic flavour.

These foods make a hearty, colourful meal that will please your guests and take advantage of the waning days of barbecue season.

The fine art of dining locally

While you are enjoying your "art on a plate," your dinner-table conversation might turn to ways to enjoy the art that our local farmers grow.

Take a tour of a different kind, with trips to the Lake Simcoe area's many farms and markets. The lakeside community is dotted with farms and markets that have local produce and meats to make your meals as fresh and healthy as they can be.

At Avalon Orchards in Innisfil, for ex-

ample, you can pick your own organic apples and buy some fresh cider to take home. Or stop by Barrie Hill Farms, the largest grower of blueberries in Ontario. Take some home for a luscious blueberry pie.

Morris Gervais of Barrie Hill Farms, who is also the president of Simcoe County Farm Fresh, an association of farmers, markets and restaurants, says there is much to offer for those in search of fresh, local ingredients. You can find farms selling organic vegetables and free-range meats, and restaurants such as Shutter's Restaurant and Bar in Barrie and The Village Inn in Thornton that are proud to serve the products of local farmers.

Visiting farmers' markets is also a great way to check out the produce of many farms all in one convenient location. Some of the markets also sell preserves, baked goods, flowers, specialty cheeses, jewelry and handmade crafts. The year-round markets in Orillia and Barrie (see the story on page 37) are among the largest and best known, but other communities, including Beaverton, Bradford and Georgina, also have farmers' markets. Not far from the lake, there are farmers' markets in Aurora, Newmarket and Uxbridge. And there is a new market on Tuesdays outside Barrie's Royal Victoria Hospital. Visit www.farmersmarketsontario.com for details about local markets.

There are also special seasonal events to keep in mind. Sandra Trainor, project manager for Simcoe County Farm Fresh, says the association is planning to partner with Georgian College's culinary arts and tourism programs this fall for a tasting event. The event will showcase local foods prepared by chefs and students, for a fine dining experience.

Trainor says the association is very excited about working with Georgian College on this event. "It's important to eat locally," she says. "Buying food from a farmer down the road means you can talk to the farmer about how he or she grew it." And that's something you can't get from a supermarket. For details, check www.simcoecountyfarmfresh.ca.

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