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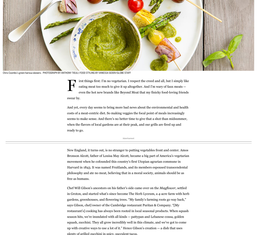
Can you make a vegetarian meal on the grill? Let local chefs show you how

Four surefire recipes to serve as part of a vegetarian meal — or with a big juicy burger.

By, Rachel Orr | Jul 17 2019 - 5:00am



Chris Cassidy | grilled tofu skewers. PHOTOGRAPHER: ANDREW TOLL/ FOOD STYLIST: ANGELA SCHOLL/ FOOD PROP: ALEX SMITH

Hot things first: I'm no vegetarian. I respect the crud and all, but I simply like eating meat too much to give it up altogether. And I'm sure of here-meets-there — even the hot new brands like Beyond Meat that are finally food tasting friends away by.

And yet, every day seems to bring more bad news about the environmental and health impacts of our meat-heavy diets, and I'm not the only one who's been encouraged by science to make some, and there's no better time to give that a shot than midsummer, when the flavors of local gardens are at their peak, and our grills are fired up and ready to go.

New England, it turns out, is no stranger to putting vegetables front and center. Amos Miller and Eric Stromberg-Popkin of Pemaquid Group of Restaurants in Pemaquid, Maine, mentioned when they unleashed this creation by Chris Cassidy-agronomy consultant in Harvard (a thing, I was named Firehouse), and by members represented transcendental philosophy and are an issue, believing that in a mixed society, animals should be as free as humans.

Chef Will Gibson specializes on his father's side-some over on the Ringleaver, settled in Gordon, and started what's since become The Dirty Lyonna, a scare farm with herb gardens, greenhouses, and flowering trees. "My family's farming was pretty big," says Gibson, chef/owner of the Cambridge restaurant Purfoot & Company. "My grandfather was a farmer, and I remember helping him harvesting potatoes. The potatoes were tiny, we're translated with all kinds — potatoes and Lebanese cucus, golden squash, zucchini. They all grew incredibly well in this climate, and we've got to come up with creative ways to use a lot of it." Bonus Gibson's creation — a dish that uses plenty of grilled zucchini in spicy, succulent tacos.

Gibson knows that grilling veggies brings out sweet, earthy, and caramelized flavors — complexities that can elevate any veggie to main-dish status. Here, a handful of local chefs share recipes that do just that. I tried each to my home and made a few adjustments so they'd be easier to create in mines. And after tasting them, I was a convert. Grilled vegetables can be a meal, grilled vegetables as often as possible, all summer long — and sometimes alongside a burger.

Related

- Recipe: The secret to a perfect burger

Chris Cassidy, chef/co-owner of Dennera

GRIEN SARDINA SKEWERS

Make a serving (a dozen per serving)

"If you have an herb garden, this is a great kitchen-sink recipe," says Boston restaurateur Cassidy. "All of the herbs and cut-from the peppers are interchangeable depending on what you have available."

Assorted vegetables of your choice, enough to fill 6 skewers

Extra-virgin olive oil

- green bell peppers
- jalapeño
- bunch cilantro
- bunch mint
- bunch basil
- garlic cloves
- teaspoon toasted cumin
- teaspoon toasted coriander
- teaspoon black pepper
- teaspoon salt
- cup canola oil

Cut and dicence enough vegetables of your choice to fill 6 skewers, (alternate with slim-cut, sweet-cut, and pod-pepper, and set aside.

Bread the green and jalapeño peppers whole over a medium hot fire, turning with tongs until blackened all around. When cool enough to handle, remove the skins and seeds and set aside.

Combine the peppers and the seed & ingredients — cilantro through salt — in a blender. Start the blender on low and ramp it to medium-high speed, adding the canola oil in a stream. (Or blend in a food processor fitted with a steel blade.) Continue blending until pour it into a bowl (one or two bowls) and stir in enough chilli to maintain its green color.

CHRIS CASSIDY. PHOTOGRAPHER: ANDREW TOLL/ FOOD STYLIST: ANGELA SCHOLL

Grill the skewered vegetable over a medium-hot fire until the outside has a slight char, about 4 minutes on each side.

Spoon the harissa over the grilled vegetables to serve. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Tom Berry, culinary director of Yvonne's

ROMAN STREET CAULIFLOWER

Makes a serving

Berry serves this earthy, zesty smoky grill at Yvonne's in Boston. The richness of the pecorino and Sardinian almonds deepens its flavor and makes it a deceptively filling dish.

- medium heads cauliflower, leaves and stem removed
- tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for cooking
- tablespoons kosher salt
- tablespoons ground fennel seed
- cups Spicy Aglaio (see accompanying recipe)
- cup grated Locatelli pecorino
- cup Romanesco Almonds (see accompanying recipe)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place the whole cauliflower heads in a shallow pan and rub them with the olive oil. Mix the salt and fennel seed, and sprinkle the mixture generously over the cauliflower, reserving some for later. Cover the pan lightly in foil and bake for 30 minutes, until the cauliflower is tender. Remove from pan and set aside to cool.

Slice the cauliflower into a steak (it's OK if they don't stay intact), rub lightly with olive oil, and season with the remaining fennel salt. Grill over a medium hot fire for about 3-4 minutes on each side, until well browned and caramelized.

Cut the cooled cauliflower into 1-inch pieces and toss it in a bowl with the Spicy Aglaio and roast of the grated pecorino cheese (or garnish). Plate the cauliflower and garnish with the Romanesco Almonds and reserved pecorino cheese.

SPICY AGLAIO'S

- pestoverload egg yolks
- tablespoons Gabbia's brown mustard
- tablespoon salt

Zest of 3 lemons

- tablespoons minced garlic
- tablespoon minced Calabrian chiles in oil, stems and seeds removed
- tablespoon Calabrian chili oil (from the chili packing liquid)
- cups olive oil
- cup canola oil
- tablespoons (3 ounces) lemon juice
- cup grated Locatelli pecorino
- tablespoons honey

Place the egg yolks, mustard, salt, lemon zest, garlic, and Calabrian chilies in a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Pulse to combine. Slowly, with the food processor machine running, drizzle oils in to emulsify. Add a little of the lemon juice and stir to cool if the mixture gets too thick. Once all the oil is emulsified, add the cheese and process until smooth. Stir in the remaining lemon juice and honey.

ROMEMARY ALMONDS

- tablespoons olive oil
- tablespoons finely chopped rosemary
- cups whole blanched almonds, no skin
- tablespoon salt
- teaspoon ground fennel seed

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Mix all the ingredients in a bowl and spread evenly on a sheet tray. Bake for about 10 to 8 minutes, until the almonds are a light golden brown. Remove and cool on a paper-towel-lined plate. Coarsely chop in a food processor or by hand.

Carolyn Johnson, chef of 90 Thoreau

GRILLED CORN, ORCHARDALL, AND QUINOA SALAD

Makes a serving

Johnson has been putting veggies in the spotlight her entire career — first at the now-closed Jeremy Restaurant in Ogunquit, Maine, and now at the Thoreau in Concord, where she features a local corn and tomato tasting menu every summer. For this salad, the corn's sweetness is an ideal foil for the bitter mustards. Soft yet a big flavor boost from the grill.

- head cocoarde
- ears corn, husks and silks removed
- bell peppers, any color
- red onion, peeled and sliced into ½-inch rings

Extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and pepper

- cup cucumber, seeded and diced
- cups cooked Quinoa (see accompanying recipe)
- cup Champagne Vinaigrette (see accompanying recipe)
- pint loose fresh herb leaves of your choice

Heat the grill to medium. Cut the head of cocoarde in quarters, making sure to leave the core intact to hold the leaves together. Soak the pieces in a large bowl of kaph water for 5 minutes, then rinse thoroughly under running water. Shake the excess water off vigorously and let drain for at least 5 minutes.

Rub the corn, peppers, and onion slices with olive oil. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

Place the peppers over a medium hot fire until the skins blister. Set aside in a bowl and cover with a lid or plastic wrap. Alternately, place the onion slices and the corn ears directly on the grill. Turn the ears and slices as needed to char and cook evenly, about 10 minutes. Remove from the grill and cut the corn off the cobs, and set aside.

Peel the peppers, remove the seeds, and slice them into ½-inch strips.

Add the cucumber, cooked quinoa, and vinaigrette to a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Add the corn, onion, and peppers, and toss gently. Plate the salad and garnish with the Romanesco Almonds and reserved pecorino cheese.

Jessica Johnson | Photo: MATT CLAYTON

CHAMPAGNE VINAIGRETTE

- cup Champagne vinegar
- small shallot, minced
- tablespoon Dijon mustard
- teaspoon salt

Black pepper

- cup extra-virgin olive oil

Whisk the vinegar, shallot, mustard, salt, and pepper to taste together in a bowl. Slowly whisk in the olive oil to emulsify.

Will Gibson, chef/owner of Purfoot & Company

GRILLED ZUCCHINI TACOS WITH CABBAGE SLAW AND CHIPOTLE CREMA

Makes a serving

Grilled zucchini tacos with cabbage slaw and chipotle crema. PHOTOGRAPHER: ANDREW TOLL/ FOOD STYLIST: ANGELA SCHOLL

"This tender zucchini like a steak, using a spice rub and letting it sit with salt on it for a while, so it's hearty and juicy," says Gibson. "When you really think about it, most of the time we're treating us taco-or-vegetables-serious, so just keep going and make them with all veggies."

- pound zucchini
- tablespoons kosher salt
- teaspoon brown sugar
- teaspoon paprika
- teaspoon chili powder
- teaspoon black pepper
- teaspoon garlic powder
- teaspoon cumin
- tablespoons vegetable oil
- white corn or flour tortillas

Split the zucchini lengthwise into ½-inch-thick slices and season with kosher salt. Place on a baking tray and let sit for 20 minutes to allow the water to escape from the zucchini.

Blend the brown sugar, paprika, chili powder, pepper, garlic powder, and cumin and pick the spices evenly over the zucchini. Grill over a medium hot fire until grill marks appear, for a few slight char but the inside is still a little firm, about 7 to 10 minutes. Set aside.

Warm the tortillas in the microwave or over an open flame for 30 seconds.

Slice zucchini and serve on warm tortillas, topped with slaw and crema (see accompanying recipes), and toppings such as Cotija cheese, diced tomatoes, fresh cilantro, avocado slices, lime wedges, and hot sauce.

CHIPOTLE CREMA SAUCE

- cup sour cream
- Tsp. mayonnaise
- small lime, juiced
- teaspoon garlic powder
- teaspoon cumin
- teaspoon chipotle chili powder or smoked paprika
- teaspoon salt
- teaspoon Tabasco hot sauce

Add all the ingredients to a small bowl and whisk together. Refrigerate the sauce until ready to serve.

CABBAGE SLAW

- pound finely sliced or pre-shredded cabbage
- teaspoon salt
- cup thinly sliced red onion
- cup thinly sliced cilantro
- small jalapeño, diced

Juice of a fresh lime

- tablespoons vegetable oil

Place the shredded cabbage in a medium bowl. Toss with the salt. Add the onions, cilantro, jalapeño, lime juice, and oil. Set aside until ready to serve.

Will Gibson. | PHOTOGRAPHER:ANDREW TOLL/ FOOD STYLIST: ANGELA SCHOLL

Alexandra Hall is a New England food and travel writer. Send comments to feedgood@globe.com. Get the best of the magazine's award-winning stories and features right to your e-mail inbox every Sunday. Sign up here.

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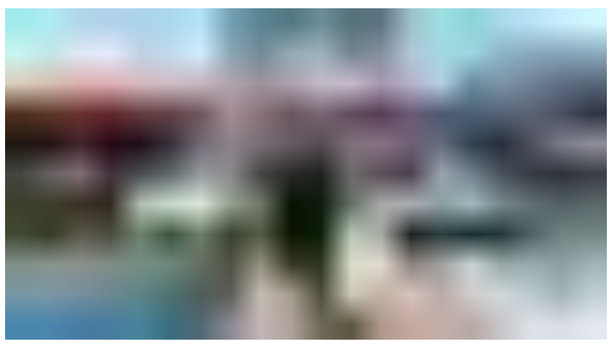
FOOD

For her first new restaurant in more than a decade, chef Barbara Lynch looks homeward

The award-winning chef — whose heart isn't in Boston the way it once was — is opening The Rudder in Gloucester, another step in a colorful journey.



YVONNE ABRAHAM

Perla, the woman migrants say enticed them onto planes, reflects an ugliness we must contend with

The woman who enticed desperate Venezuelan migrants onto the planes that dropped them on Martha's Vineyard without notice last week is straight out of a Dickens story.

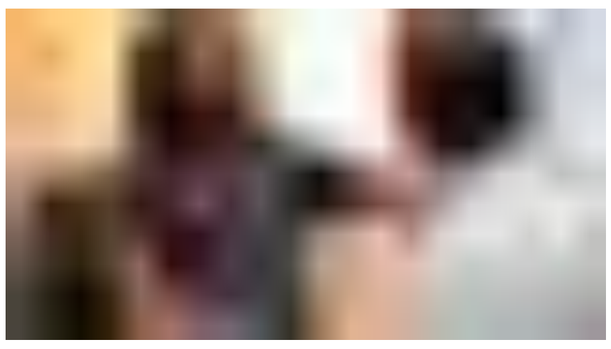
Demonstrators target Children's Hospital as hundreds rally to defend it

The counterprotesters stood in front of the hospital's main entrance along Longwood Avenue in Boston carrying signs with messages like: "We love our trans kids."

SUNDAY FOOTBALL NOTES

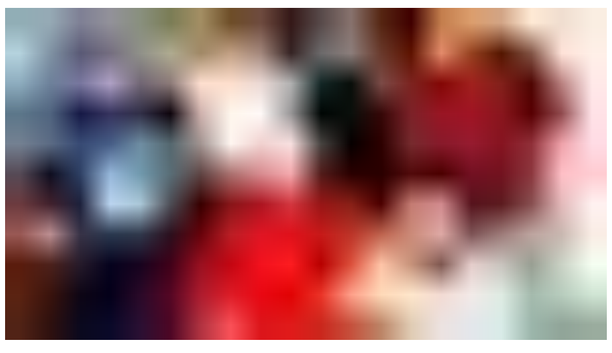
A Q&A with Ricky Williams, who found his sweet spot in life with the marijuana industry

Williams was vilified for smoking weed during his career, but few listened to his concerns about his mental health. "I feel a sense of pride that my sacrifice wasn't in vain," Williams said.



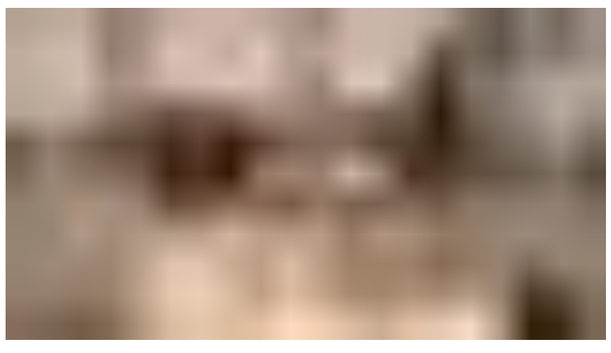
New Hampshire keeps patients in the dark about their doctors' malpractice, disciplinary records

Patients and families in New Hampshire have no reliable way to learn crucial information about a doctor because the state's medical board is one of the least transparent in the nation.



Piece by piece, Boston's monument to Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King is coming together

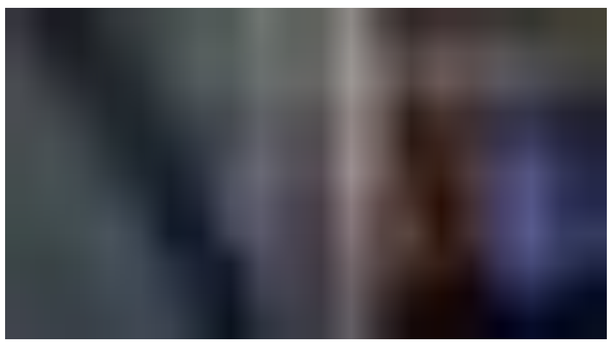
"The Embrace," Boston's long-awaited memorial to the Kings, is headed to the Common in January. Our art critic traveled to a foundry in Washington state, and visited the Brooklyn studio of artist Hank Willis Thomas, to trace its journey.



HIGH SCHOOLS

After a rash of misconduct in high school sports, what has been done, and will things be better this year?

Attorney General Maura Healey held a conference in April to address abuses, which led to pledges to work collaboratively by political, school, and other leaders.



Civil rights lawyers ask Healey, Rollins to open criminal investigation into migrants' plight

Venezuelan migrants whose surprise journey to Martha's Vineyard unwittingly thrust them into the nation's divisive immigration debate met Saturday with pro bono attorneys at their temporary quarters on Cape Cod as a prominent civil rights group asked Massachusetts prosecutors to launch criminal investigations.

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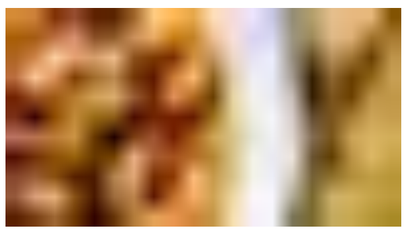

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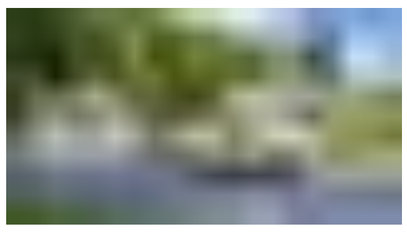

MY BOSTON HISTORY

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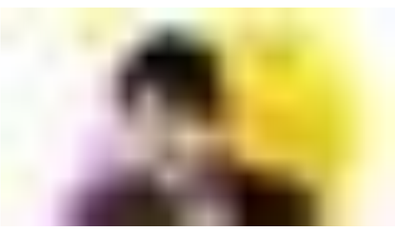
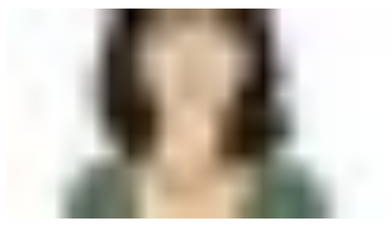


MISS CONDUCT

Is it weird that someone sent an evite for a funeral and asked me to RSVP?



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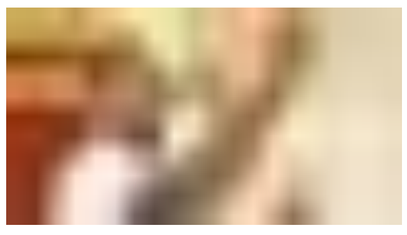
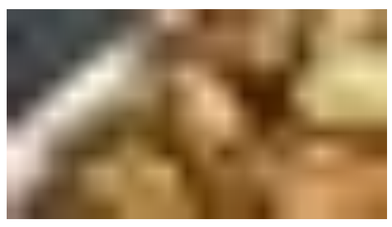


LOVE LETTERS

'I have an e-mail all queued up' for my ex. Should I send it?

COOKING | MAGAZINE

Recipes: A lighter take on Southern-style smothered chicken, ribs, and turnips



SUMMER LIVING

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