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GLOBE MAGAZINE

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 **Alexandra Hall**, July 17, 2019, 10:38 a.m.



Chris Coombs's green harissa skewers. PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY TIEULI; FOOD STYLING BY VANESSA SEDER/GLOBE STAFF

First things first: I'm no vegetarian. I respect the creed and all, but I simply like eating meat too much to give it up altogether. And I'm wary of faux meats — even the hot new brands like Beyond Meat that my finicky food-loving friends

swear by.

And yet, every day seems to bring more bad news about the environmental and health costs of a meat-centric diet. So making veggies the focal point of meals increasingly seems to make sense. 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 Bronson Alcott, father of Louisa May Alcott, became a big part of America's vegetarian movement when he cofounded this country's first Utopian agrarian commune in Harvard in 1843. It was named Fruitlands, and its members espoused transcendental philosophy and ate no meat, believing that in a moral society, animals should be as free as humans.

Chef Will Gilson's ancestors on his father's side came over on the *Mayflower*, settled in Groton, and started what's since become The Herb Lyceum, a 4-acre farm with herb gardens, greenhouses, and flowering trees. "My family's farming roots go way back," says Gilson, chef/owner of the Cambridge restaurant Puritan & Company. "[My restaurant's] cooking has always been rooted in local seasonal products. When squash season hits, we're inundated with all kinds — pattypan and Lebanese cousa, golden squash, zucchini. They all grow incredibly well in this climate, and we've got to come up with creative ways to use a lot of it." Hence Gilson's creation — a dish that uses plenty of grilled zucchini in spicy, succulent tacos.

Gilson 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 tested each in my home and made a few

adjustments so they're easier to create in yours. And after tasting them, I was a convert. Not to vegetarianism, but to eating grilled vegetables as often as possible, all summer long — and sometimes alongside a burger.

Chris Coombs, chef/co-owner of Deuxave

GREEN HARISSA SKEWERS

Makes 4 servings (2 skewers per serving)

“If you have an herb garden, this is a great kitchen-sink recipe,” says Boston restaurateur Coombs. “All of the herbs and even the peppers are interchangeable depending on what you have available.”

Assorted vegetables of your choice, enough to fill 8 skewers

Extra-virgin olive oil

2 green bell peppers

1 jalapeño

1 bunch cilantro

1 bunch mint

1 bunch basil

2 garlic cloves

1 teaspoon toasted cumin

2 teaspoons toasted coriander

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

1 teaspoon salt

3/4 cup canola oil



Chris Coombs ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Cut and skewer enough vegetables of your choice to fill 8 skewers. Lightly coat with olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and set aside.

Roast 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 next 8 ingredients — cilantro through salt — in a blender. Start the blender on low and work up to medium-high speed, adding the canola oil in a stream. (Or blend in a food processor until smooth.) Once the mixture is fully emulsified, pour it into a bowl over an ice bath and stir to quickly chill to maintain its green color.

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 4 servings



Roman street cauliflower. PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY TIEULI; FOOD STYLING BY VANESSA SEDER

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

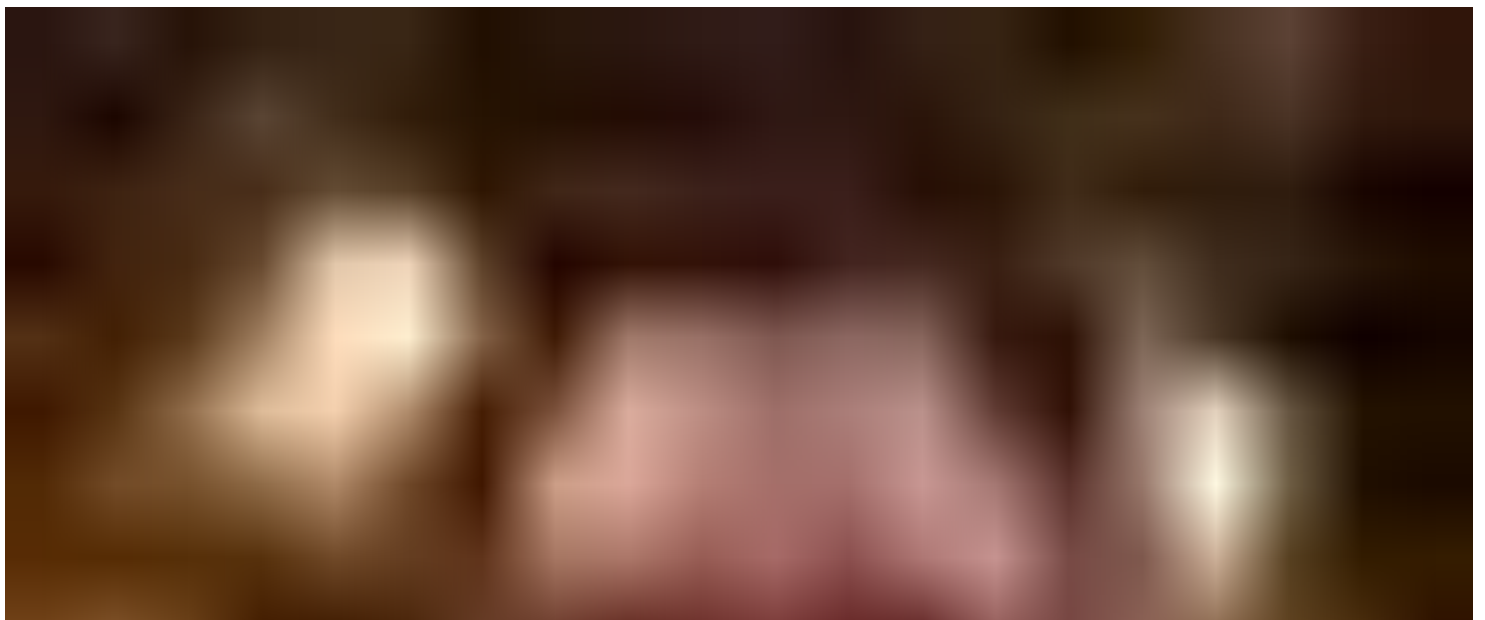
- 2 medium heads cauliflower, leaves and stem removed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for cooking
- 6 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons ground fennel seed

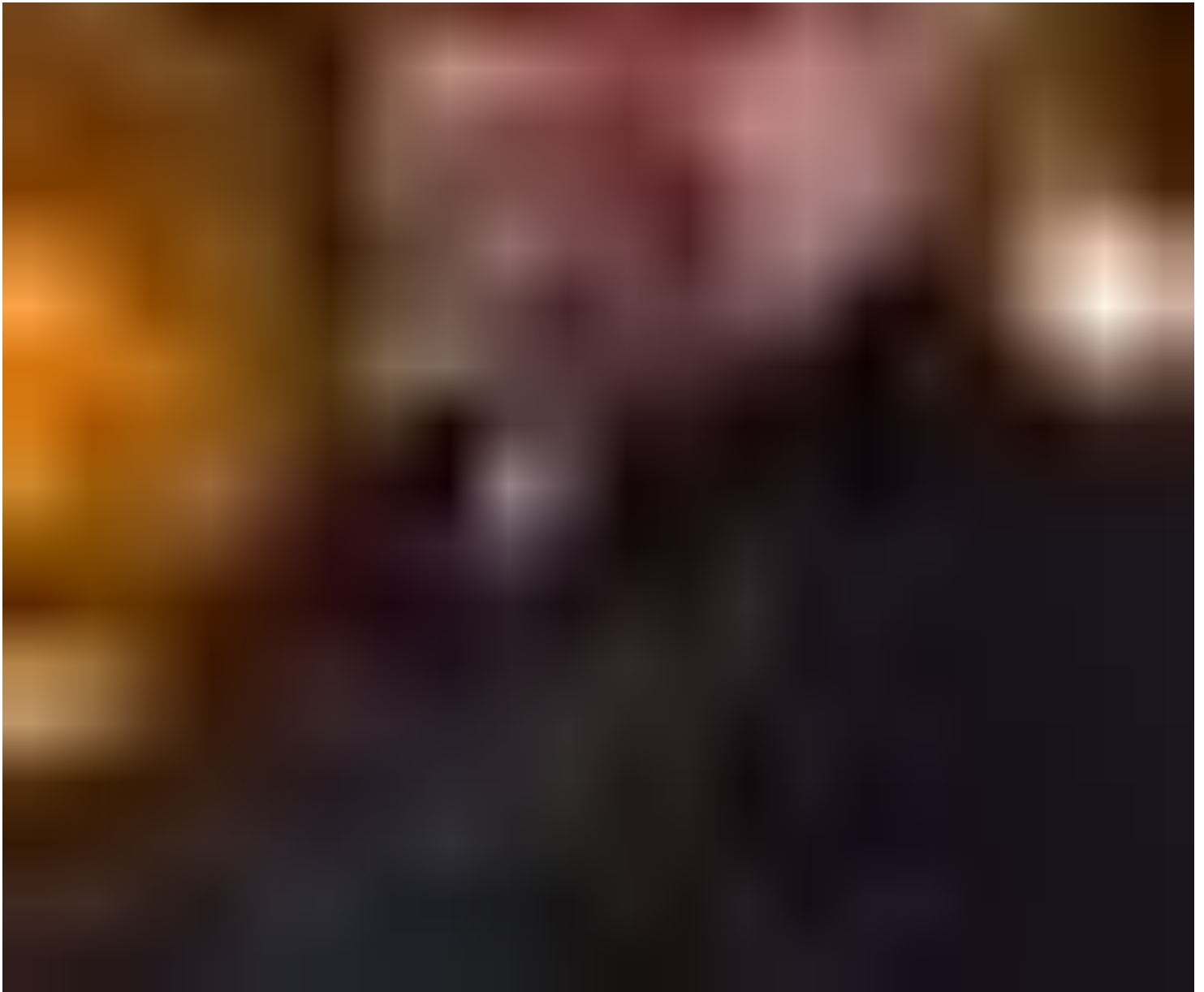
- 2 cups Spicy Agliata (see accompanying recipe)
- 1 cup grated Locatelli pecorino
- 1 cup Rosemary Almonds (see accompanying recipe)

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 tightly in foil and bake for 30-40 minutes, until the cauliflower is tender. Remove from pan and set aside to cool.

Slice the cauliflower into 4 steaks (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 cooked cauliflower into 2-inch pieces and toss it in a bowl with the Spicy Agliata and most of the grated pecorino (reserve some for garnish). Plate the cauliflower and sprinkle with the Rosemary Almonds and reserved pecorino cheese.





Tom Berry MELISSA OSTROW

SPICY AGLIATA

- 2 pasteurized egg yolks
- 1 tablespoons Gulden's brown mustard
- 1 tablespoon salt

Zest of 3 lemons

- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon minced Calabrian chilies in oil, stems and seeds removed
- 1 tablespoon Calabrian chili oil (from the chili packing liquid)
- 1 cup olive oil
- 1 cup canola oil
- 10 tablespoons (5 ounces) lemon juice
- 1 cup grated Locatelli pecorino
- 2 tablespoons honey

Add the egg yolks, mustard, salt, lemon zest, garlic, and Calabrian chilies to a food processor. In a bowl, mix together the chili, olive, and canola oils, and, with the machine running, drizzle oils in to emulsify. Add a little of the lemon juice and an ice cube if the mixture gets too thick. Once all the oil is emulsified, add the cheese and process until smooth, then add the remaining lemon juice and honey.

ROSEMARY ALMONDS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped rosemary
- 1 cup whole blanched almonds, no skin
- 1 tablespoon salt

1 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 6 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 80 Thoreau

GRILLED CORN, ESCAROLE, AND QUINOA SALAD

Makes 4 servings



Grilled corn, escarole, and quinoa salad. PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY TIEULI; FOOD STYLING BY VANESSA SEDER

Johnson has been putting veggies in the spotlight her entire career — first at the now-closed Arrows Restaurant in Ogunquit, Maine, and now at 80 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 escarole; both get a big flavor boost from the grill.

- 1 head escarole
- 4 ears corn, husks and silks removed
- 2 bell peppers, any color
- 1 red onion, peeled and sliced into 1/2-inch rings

Extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and pepper

- 1 cup cucumber, seeded and diced
- 2 cups cooked Quinoa (see accompanying recipe)
- 1/2 cup Champagne Vinaigrette (see accompanying recipe)
- 1 pint loose fresh herb leaves of your choice

Heat the grill to medium. Cut the head of escarole in quarters, making sure to leave the core intact to hold the leaves together. Soak the pieces in a large bowl of tepid water for 5 minutes, then rinse thoroughly under running water. Shake the excess water off vigorously and let drain for at least 15 minutes.

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

Char the peppers over a medium-hot fire until the skins blister. Set aside in a bowl and cover with a lid or plastic wrap. Let sit for 5 minutes, then remove the skins and seeds and chop into small pieces.

Grill the onion slices whole, char on each side, and then move to a cooler part of the grill to finish cooking and to soften. Remove from the grill and dice when cool enough to touch.

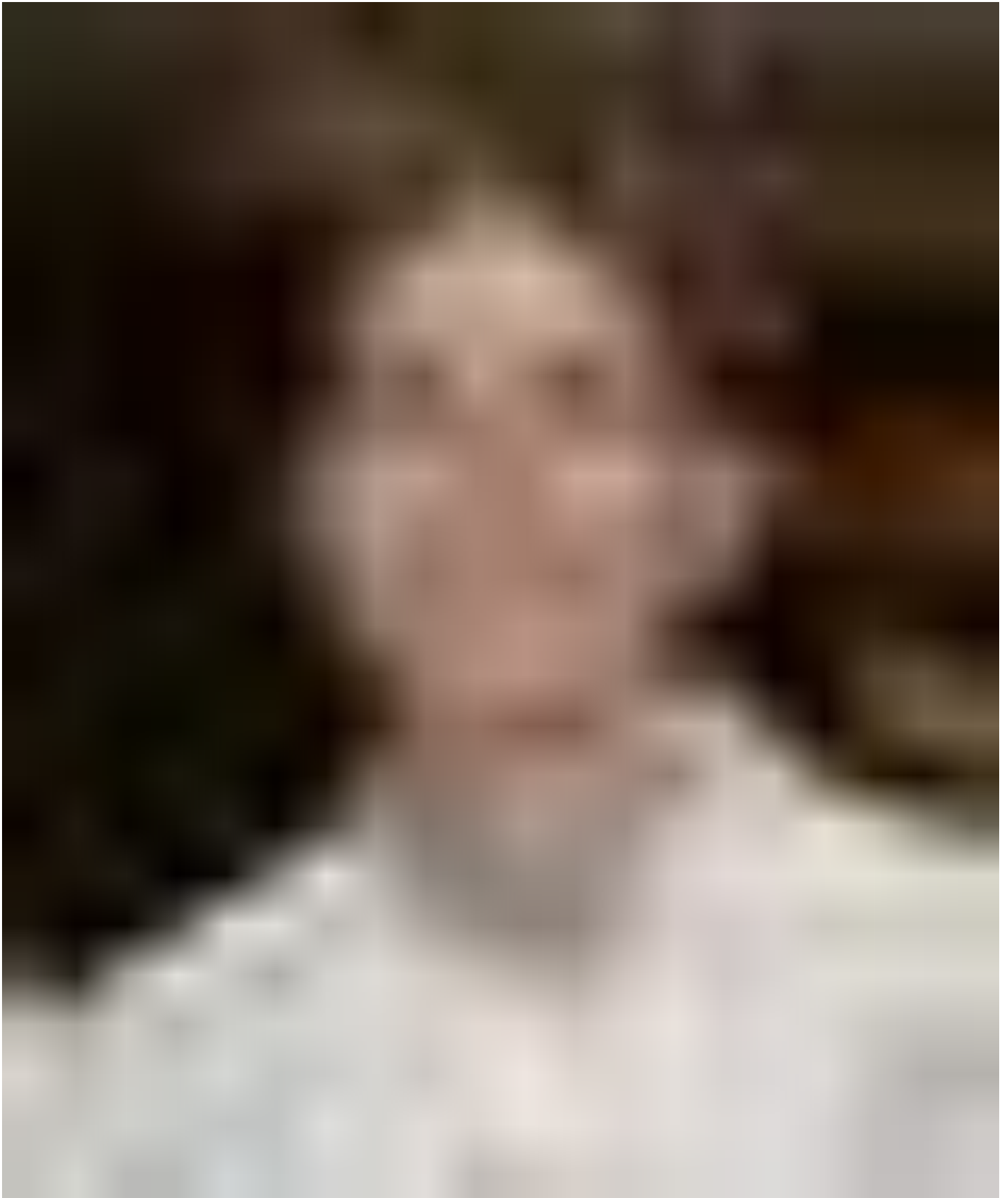
Grill the corn, turning frequently until lightly charred all around. Cut the kernels off the cobs when cool enough to touch.

Mix the chopped peppers, onion, corn, cucumber, Quinoa, and vinaigrette in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste, then set aside.

Drizzle the quarters of escarole with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Grill the escarole until wilted and charred in spots. Remove from the grill and cut the cores out. Put one quarter on each plate.

Tear the herb leaves by hand and add to the vegetable-quinoa mixture. Spoon over and around the escarole.



Carolyn Johnson BILL BRETT/GLOBE FILE

QUINOA

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 shallot, minced

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1 cup quinoa, well rinsed

1 1/2 cups vegetable broth or water

Set a small saucepan with a tight-fitting lid over medium heat. Add the olive oil, shallot, and salt. Stir well and sauté until shallots are translucent.

Add the quinoa and cook for 2 minutes, stirring several times.

Add the liquid and bring to a simmer.

Cover the pot and turn the heat to low. Cook 15 minutes. Remove pot from heat, but don't open the lid. Let sit 5 minutes.

Fluff the cooked quinoa with a fork and transfer to a bowl to cool until ready to add to the vegetables.

CHAMPAGNE VINAIGRETTE

1/4 cup champagne vinegar

1 small shallot, minced

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

2 teaspoons salt

Black pepper

1 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 Gilson, chef/owner of Puritan & Company

GRILLED ZUCCHINI TACOS WITH CABBAGE SLAW AND CHIPOTLE CREMA

Makes 4 servings



Grilled zucchini tacos with cabbage slaw and chipotle crema. PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTHONY TIEULI; FOOD STYLING BY VANESSA SEDER

“This treats zucchini like a meat, using a spice rub and letting it sit with salt on it for a while, so it’s hearty and juicy,” says Gilson. “When you really think about it, most of the things you’re eating in a taco are vegetables anyway, so just keep going and make them with all veggies.”

1 pound zucchini

- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 3 teaspoons brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1½ teaspoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 8 white corn or flour tortillas

Split the zucchini lengthwise into ¼-inch-thick slices and season with kosher salt. Place on a baking tray and let sit for 10 minutes to allow the water to seep from the zucchini.

Blend the brown sugar, paprika, chili powder, pepper, garlic powder, and cumin and then sprinkle the mixture evenly over the zucchini. Grill over a medium-hot fire until the outside has a 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 Cojita cheese, diced tomatoes, fresh

cilantro, avocado slices, lime wedges, and hot sauce.



Will Gilson KEITH BEDFORD/GLOBE FILE/GLOBE STAFF

CHIPOTLE CREMA SAUCE

1/2 cup sour cream

1/3 cup mayonnaise

1 small lime, juiced

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon cumin

1 teaspoon chipotle chili powder or smoked paprika

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon Tabasco hot sauce

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

CABBAGE SLAW

1 pound thinly sliced or pre-shredded cabbage

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 cup thinly sliced red onion

1/2 cup thinly sliced cilantro

1 small jalapeño, diced

Juice of 2 fresh limes

2 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.

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

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