

[Brandywine Table]

Root Vegetables and Pumpkins: Fruits of Fall

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Discover the bounty that is autumn.

MAYBE I'VE LISTENED TO TOO MANY PUNDITS during this election season because although I know better, I've slipped into the habit of dividing the world into showhorses vs. workhorses, style vs. substance. Even researching this article made me think: Pumpkin? Attention-hogging showhorse. Root vegetables? Plain-Jane workhorses.

Yet after a visit to **Greener Partners** at their **Longview Farm** in Collegeville, I was reminded that pumpkins are much more than homey fall décor and that roasted garnet beets alongside flame colored sweet potatoes can be the showpiece of any menu. More importantly, I was reminded that categories—in cooking, in politics, in communities—cloud our sense of possibility.

“Greener Partners’ mission is creating healthy communities through food, farms and education,” says Executive Director Meg MacCurtin. While too numerous to name, their programs at Longview,

Guild House West in North Philadelphia and Lankenau Medical Center in Wynnewood aim to connect people to the land and to ensure that everyone, regardless of income, has access to nutritious food. Longview alone boasts a 440+ family CSA, 20 raised beds dedicated to education programs, a farmer training apprenticeship program, a u-pick farm (pumpkins in fall) and Saturday farmers’ market. In 2015, GP donated 8,000 pounds of food raised at Longview to local food pantries and shelters and sold subsidized food at area farmers’ markets.



Longview Farm

For children who can't make it to a farm, Greener Partners' Farm Explorer program brings the farm to them. Last year GP's two mobile farm trucks, packed with root and other vegetables grown in modular raised beds, visited 60 high-poverty schools where over 8,500 students had their first hands-on farming experience.

Education Director Helen Nadel never tires of watching a student's surprise when he plucks a turnip from the soil or discovers carrots come in a rainbow of colors. She talks with students about how taproots work (“That's where the plants' energy is stored, so when we eat a beet or a potato, that energy goes into us.”). She feeds them a little food history (“American colonists got their sugar from beetroot.”). And because a bite is the best teacher, she and her students cook together.

With a minimum of tools—graters, knives, blender, hot plate—they turn beets and knobby carrots into a vibrant raw salad dressed with maple vinaigrette and whip up a sweet potato dip reminiscent of pumpkin pie. Even root vegetables' humble green leaves are transformed into vibrant pestos. And one taste of pumpkin soup with apples has students viewing the Halloween fruit in a whole new light.

As you cook with the fruits of fall, here's hoping you discover all of their tasty possibilities.



From above-left: Farmer Jon and young people at the Farm Explorer Truck; making a healthy snack on the smoothie bike; Helen Nadel, Director of Education, explores a tomato plant with students.

Roasted Root Vegetables with Muhammara Sauce

Muhammara is a dip or sauce with sweet, savory and spicy Middle Eastern flavors. Here it enhances the flavors of simply roasted root vegetables. Recipe courtesy of Helen Nadel, Greener Partners.

For the vegetables:

- 1 lb. sweet potatoes
- 1 lb. carrots
- 1 lb. parsnips
- 1 lb. celery root
- 1 lb. turnips (Hakurei or other sweet, tender variety is wonderful.)
- 6 Tb. olive oil, more or less
- 2 tsp. kosher or sea salt

For the sauce:

- 2 red peppers, roasted, peeled, seeds removed
- ½ C. fresh breadcrumbs
- ⅓ C. walnuts, toasted and chopped
- 1–2 garlic cloves, chopped very fine (or mashed to a paste with the 1 tsp. salt)
- 2 Tb. pomegranate molasses or maple syrup
- 1–2 Tb. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. cumin or za'atar (Mid-East spice mix)
- Dash of cayenne or smoked paprika
- ¾ C. olive oil
- 1 tsp. salt

Optional: Fresh Italian parsley, mint, thyme, or cilantro

Preheat oven to 400°. Wash and scrub all vegetables. Keeping them separate, cut each vegetable into 1" chunks. If you like, you can cut them differently, such as carrots and parsnips on the bias, turnips into small wedges, etc., but still keeping them all roughly the same size.

Place one vegetable at a time on a heavy baking tray, pour about 1 Tb. of olive oil and a sprinkle of salt over, then mix with your hands until the vegetable is coated. (Alternatively, you can do this step in a bowl with a spoon and then place the vegetable on the tray). Add a bit more olive oil if necessary. Make sure there is a bit of space on the pan between vegetables.

Roast in the oven, turning once, about 15 minutes. Check for tenderness. Vegetables should be turning golden and a bit crispy at the edges. Return to the oven for 5–15 minutes. Cooking time will vary, depending on the vegetable and the size of the pieces. Once a vegetable is cooked,

remove from the oven, placing each vegetable in a different container. Roast all vegetables in this manner.

While vegetables are roasting, make the muhammara sauce. Purée peppers, breadcrumbs, walnuts and garlic in a blender. Add molasses, lemon, cumin and cayenne and continue to blend. Pour olive oil in a slow stream while blender is running until desired consistency is reached. Taste for salt. Add more pomegranate molasses for sweetness or cayenne if it needs more of a kick.

When all vegetables are cooked, you can reheat them briefly in the oven or serve at room temperature.

To serve, spoon some muhammara onto a platter, spreading the sauce so there is a thin layer across the bottom. Spoon each vegetable on top, in stripes, wedges, or pattern of your choice. Place another spoonful or two of muhammara on top and serve extra sauce on the side.

Makes 10–12 servings.

Sweet Potato Dip

Helen Nadel of Greener Partners suggests making savory variations of this dip by replacing the maple, vanilla and cinnamon with a combination of Greek yogurt or coconut cream, lime, cilantro, cumin and a pinch of cayenne. Dip can be stored in the refrigerator for 3–4 days.

- 1–3 sweet potatoes, enough to yield 2 C.
- 1–2 Tb. maple syrup
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- Salt, to taste

Very Superstitious: Pumpkin and Root Vegetable Superstitions

Everyone knows scary faces carved into pumpkins ward off evil spirits. But did you know that the tradition originated in the British Isles where turnips and beets were used instead?

Hundreds of superstitions swirl around the familiar orange fruit and the root vegetables of fall. Read on to discover the secrets to health, wealth and true love, all courtesy of your vegetable bin!

If you dream of pumpkins, you will enjoy prosperity, well-being or a healthy child. But if you dream of cut or peeled pumpkin, you'll experience misfortune or uncover a cunning person among your friends and family.

If a man and woman eat from the same beet, they will fall in love.

If you make a wish while burning an onion, the wish will come true.

If you want to get rid of a wart, cut a potato in half, rub it on the wart, and bury it in a garden. As the potato rots, the wart disappears.

If you peel the skin of a turnip without breaking it and hang the long spiral over a doorway, the next person who enters will be your future partner in life.

If you rub the top of a carrot on the top of a sick person's head, that person will be cured.



Preheat oven to 400°. Prick sweet potatoes with a fork. Place on baking sheet and bake for 1–1½ hours, until soft.

Remove from oven, cool and then scoop out the soft potato, leaving the skin behind.

Measure 2 C. sweet potatoes and blend with maple syrup, cinnamon, vanilla and salt in a food processor or mash well with fork.

Makes 6–8 servings.

Pumpkin or Butternut Squash Soup

When Helen Nadel of Greener Partners makes this recipe with students through the Farm Explorer program, she streamlines it, eliminating the onion and toppings. No matter which version you make, you'll end up with a hearty, healthy soup.

- 1 pumpkin or butternut squash (2–3 lbs.)
- 3 apples
- 1 onion, roughly chopped
- 1 Tb. oil
- ½ Tb. curry powder
- 3 C. broth or water
- ½ clove of garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Toppings (optional):
 - Pumpkin seeds fried in olive oil with a little curry powder

Chopped cilantro
Squeeze of lime
Dollop of Greek yogurt

Preheat oven to 400°. Cut squash and apples in half and remove seeds. Place apples and squash skin side up on a few baking pans. Bake for 25–30 minutes. Remove apples from oven. Continue baking squash for another 10–15 minutes.

While pumpkins and apples are cooking, cook chopped onion in oil over medium-low heat in a pot until golden brown. Add curry and cook for one minute. Remove from heat and set aside.

Heat broth or water in a large pot. Scoop the squash from its skin and add to the pot. Add the apples, onion, garlic and salt and pepper to taste.

Purée with a stick blender or, working in batches, purée in a blender or food processor until smooth. Garnish with toppings.

Makes 3–5 servings.

Carrot and Beet Salad

This recipe can also be made without beets by doubling the carrots. Greener Partners is nut-free, but if you want to replace the pumpkin seeds with nuts, Helen Nadel recommends toasted pecans.



For the salad:

1 lb. carrots, washed and peeled
1 lb. beets, washed and peeled
½ C. pumpkin seeds, toasted

For the dressing:

3 Tb. olive oil
2 Tb. balsamic vinegar
1–2 tsp. maple syrup
1 tsp. Dijon mustard
Salt and pepper to taste
Fresh herbs, cook's choice, to taste

Shred carrots and beets using a food processor or grater. Add pumpkin seeds.

To make the dressing, whisk together olive oil, vinegar, maple syrup, mustard, salt, pepper and herbs. Pour over vegetables and stir.

Salad will keep in refrigerator for 3 days.
Makes 8–10 servings.

Crustless Onion Quiche with Pancetta

Serve with a butter leaf lettuce or arugula salad dressed with a lemony vinaigrette. Adapted from Patricia Wells' At Home in Provence.



1 lb. sweet onions, peeled
3 Tb. butter plus more for greasing pie plate
1 Tb. fresh thyme or lemon thyme leaves
6 oz. pancetta, chopped into tiny pieces or strips*

Salt and pepper to taste
Nutmeg to taste
5 large eggs
Generous ¼ C. whole milk
¼ C. heavy cream

Optional: fresh Italian parsley, chopped

* *Trader Joe's sells 4-oz. packages of pancetta cut into very small cubes.*

Preheat oven to 425°. Generously grease a 10" pie plate with butter.

In a large skillet, cook pancetta for a few minutes until it renders some fat and starts to crisp. Drain off fat and set pancetta aside.

Slice the onions in half and then cut into thin (¼") slices. Cut 3 Tb. butter into pieces (you don't have to be persnickety about size) and combine with onion, thyme, salt, pepper and nutmeg in a large skillet. Turn heat on medium-low and cover. Cook until onions are soft but not brown, stirring occasionally, about 10–15 minutes.

While onions cook, whisk eggs, milk and cream together.

Layer onions in pie plate, top with pancetta and pour egg mixture over top. Place in the center of the oven and cook until top

is golden brown and eggs are set and not jiggly, about 25–30 minutes.

Allow to cool for 5–10 minutes. Slice into wedges and garnish with fresh parsley.
Makes 4–6 servings.

Oven Baked Sweet Potato Fries

I adapted the fries from the blog www.foodiewithfamily.com.

For the potatoes:

2 lbs. sweet potatoes
3 Tb. cornstarch
2–3 Tb. olive oil
2 tsp. finely chopped or pressed garlic, optional
Kosher salt

For the dip:

½ C. mayonnaise
½–1 tsp. chipotle powder (to taste)
Juice of ½ lime

Peel the sweet potatoes and cut into approximately ¼" thick x 2" long matchsticks. Place in a bowl of cold water and soak for at least one hour or overnight in the refrigerator.

Mix dip ingredients together and refrigerate. The longer it sits, the more the flavors will develop.

Preheat oven to 425°. Line a few baking sheets with aluminum foil and spritz with cooking spray.

Rinse potatoes and dry well on paper towels or dishcloth. Put into a plastic bag. Sprinkle cornstarch on top and shake. Add olive oil (and garlic if using) and toss to coat. You may need to do this in batches to make sure cornstarch and oil coat potatoes evenly.

Spread potatoes on baking sheets. To promote crisping, make sure potatoes are not touching each other.

Bake for 15 minutes. Remove sheets from oven one at a time and flip fries. Rotate sheets so the ones on the top rack are now on the bottom and the fries that faced the back of the oven now face front.

Bake for another 10–15 minutes until desired level of crispiness and color. Turn oven off. Open oven door halfway and allow to cool and crisp for 5–10 minutes.

Keep an eye on them so they don't get too dark or brittle—unless of course you like them that way!

Makes 4–6 side servings.

Honey Whole Wheat Pumpkin Bread

From the blog "Cookie and Kate," a healthy pumpkin bread with crumb topping added. Great for breakfast, but it's not sweet enough for dessert.



For the bread:

- $\frac{2}{3}$ C. olive oil
- 1 C. honey
- 4 eggs
- 2 C. pumpkin purée
- $\frac{1}{2}$ C. hot water
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cloves
- 2 tsp. baking soda

$3\frac{1}{2}$ C. whole wheat flour (I used white whole wheat flour.)

For the topping:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ C. butter
- $\frac{1}{3}$ C. brown sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt
- Scant $\frac{3}{4}$ C. all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ C. chopped pecans, optional

To make the bread:

Preheat oven to 325° and generously butter the bottom and sides of two (9" x 5") loaf pans.

In a large bowl, beat together oil and honey. Add eggs and beat well. Stir in water, pumpkin purée and vanilla. Add cinnamon, ginger, cloves and baking soda. Mix well.

Add flour and mix until just combined. Do not overmix. Divide batter between two pans.

To make the topping:

Melt butter in a small saucepan. Stir in brown sugar, vanilla and salt until sugar is mostly dissolved. Pour into a bowl and combine with flour.

Crumble topping onto batter and scatter pecans on top, if using. Press pecans into crumb topping.

Bake for 55–65 minutes until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in pan for 5 minutes. Remove from pan and finish cooling on rack.

Makes 2 loaves. ♦

A passionate supporter of local food, Laura co-founded a farmers market, judges area food contests, and anticipates restaurant openings with the excitement most people reserve for winning a Mega Millions jackpot.



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