

Serving Up Spring

TIPS FOR FINDING FRESHNESS FROM WEST CHESTER'S NEWEST FARM-TO-TABLE EATERY.

Alyssa Thayer

EVERYTHING SEEMS TO COME ALIVE IN SPRING, the moist earthy air and warmer temperatures give us a pep in our step, and leave our taste buds yearning for brightness. “That’s what spring is all about,” says Chef Josh Taggart, chef and owner of **Mae’s West Chester**, a new farm-to-table BYOB in the heart of the borough that’s “waking up your palate and getting your first taste of freshness.”

To Chef Taggart, “farm-to-table” is more than a marketing gimmick—it’s the origin of his culinary inspiration. He came to his love of fresh ingredients at a young age, growing up in South Jersey, surrounded by farmer’s markets and roadside stands, as well as an abundance of backyard bounty from his grandparents’ garden.

During culinary school, however, Chef Taggart found himself working for a string of uninspired restaurants that seemed to have all the food delivered frozen and to take little pride in the final product.

It all changed in 1997 when he was brought aboard Tony Clark’s newly opened namesake restaurant. “I was blown away,” he remembers. “We were using produce straight out of the dirt and making



Chef Josh Taggart

dishes using every part of the ingredient—even carrot tops were turned into something.”

Once Chef Taggart got a taste of this fresher approach to food, there was no going back. He began developing relationships with farmers and looking forward to local deliveries. “A guy just shows up to the back door with baby turnips and fresh peas that were picked that morning,” he says with excitement.

After working in top kitchens all around Philadelphia (Lacroix, Buddakan and Rae), Chef Taggart brought his talents and passion for seasonal sourcing to Chester County. In 2020 he finally realized his dream of opening his own restaurant. And despite the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, his new eatery, Mae’s (named for his grandmother and daughter’s middle names), opened its doors just in time for Mother’s Day weekend.

It was quite a year! But just as a flower bud must emerge with the threat of frost still lingering in the air, Chef Taggart remained steadfast and committed to his dream. He hopes to continue to showcase the restaurant to the community this spring noting, “Some people come in and say they didn’t even know we were here.” Who can blame them? We’ve all been stuck at home!

As we emerge from our winter and quarantine cocoons, may we find some much-deserved freshness, either in the form of a new restaurant, a new recipe, or perhaps the addition of a few new ingredients to help our dishes pop!



Chef Taggart’s daughter and grandmother share the same middle name: Mae

Recipes

For Chef Taggart, the idea of spring conjures images of radishes, chervil, lemon and herbs—all ingredients you’ll find below in the recipes. Use this recipe trope to help plan the perfect springtide celebration.

Early Spring Greens with Green Goddess Dressing

This seasonal salad combines many favorite spring ingredients. Best of all, you can make the dressing with whatever leafy herbs you can get your hands on!

Greens Salad:

- 2 C. early spring greens (baby spinach, kale, etc.)
 - 1 orange, peeled and segmented
 - 1 avocado, sliced
 - 1 small cooked red beet, sliced (best to whole-roast in an aluminum foil pouch)
 - 2 radishes, sliced
 - 2 Tb. raw almonds, slivered or chopped
- Salad serves 2.

Green Goddess Dressing:

Can be stored in the fridge for up to one week.

- 1 C. Seven Stars Farm plain yogurt
- 1 C. flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 1 C. mixed leafy herbs (dill, basil, tarragon)
- 2 Tb. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp. capers
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- Salt and pepper to taste



Puree all dressing ingredients in a blender.

Assemble the salad by tossing all ingredients together with 3–4 tablespoons of dressing per cup of greens.

Serves 3–4.

Note: Since the recipe uses delicate baby greens, be sure to dress and toss just before serving.

Brighten Your Palate

After a long winter, we’re all ready to throw open the windows and head out to farmers’ markets. But for us Pennsylvanians, it’s still early in the growing season. Have no fear, we’ve compiled a list of fresh ingredients to help you dial up the flavor and make way for the coming of spring.

Lemon Lift – Whether it’s swirled into a sauce or zested on top, lemon (or any citrus) is the perfect way to help brighten things up.

Touch of Tang – A splash of vinegar can bring a recipe to life and sharpen its flavor. Word to the wise, a little goes a long way. Try a few drops at a time to let it be a supporting cast member.

Go Green – With so many local growers enjoying the longer seasons of high-tunnel greenhouses, you can actually find local baby and micro greens, even in April. These greens are delicate in taste and texture and bring life to any plate.

Say Cheese – Swap the gooey melted cheese of winter for a crumble of fresh or brined cheese (like feta or chevre) to Spring-ify your salad, flatbread or pasta.

Admire Alliums – While early spring offers less in the form of vegetables, it more than makes up for it in the allium department—bringing garlic scapes and ramps (aka wild leeks) to the table. Garlic scapes are curly green offshoots of garlic plants, which make divine pestos or hummus additions. Ramps, which look similar to scallions, are foraged. They’re best enjoyed grilled or sautéed alongside brunch eggs or a charred protein.

Herbal Infusion – Whether it’s ribbons of mint or a sprinkle of chopped parsley, fresh herbs provide a pop of color and flavor that is guaranteed to take your dish to the next level.

Marinated Goat Cheese

- 1 piece Cloud 9 Yellow Springs Farm goat cheese, split in half horizontally
- 1 lemon, zested and juiced



2 Tb. fennel fronds, chopped
1 tsp. extra virgin olive oil
Fresh cracked pepper and sea salt to taste
Marinate cheese with rest of the ingredients and let sit at room temp for 30 min.
Serve with grilled bread or your favorite crackers.
Serves 2.

Sauteed NJ Black Sea Bass with Potato Gnocchi, Baby Carrots, Spinach and Chervil Potage

Black Bass is a mild white fish that stays beautifully moist and flaky when sauteed. Chervil (aka French parsley) adds fresh, herbal notes without overpowering the dish.

Chervil potage:
4 Tb. butter (½ stick)
2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
¼ C. fennel bulb, chopped
1 large Yukon gold potato, peeled and diced
½ C. white wine
3 C. water
1 C. chervil sprigs
Salt and pepper to taste



Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic, fennel and potatoes and sauté/sweat until tender.
Deglaze pan with white wine. Add water and bring back up to a simmer for a few minutes.
Puree in blender with chervil until smooth.

Black Bass and Vegetable Preparation:

2 pieces of sea bass, 6 oz.
2 Tb. olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
2 Tb. butter
½ C. potato gnocchi
½ C. baby carrots, blanched

1 C. baby spinach
Chervil sprigs for garnish

Season fish with salt and pepper. Carefully place fish, skin-side-down, in a hot saute pan with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Lower heat to medium and cook for two minutes. Flip fish and cook for another 2–3 minutes, until cooked through.

In another saute pan, brown gnocchi in butter. Add carrots and spinach until warm and wilted.

Drain off any extra butter and begin to plate. Place vegetables and gnocchi in the bottom of bowls, top with fish and pour chervil potage around. Serve immediately.

Makes 2 servings.

Buttermilk Biscuits with Citrus Curd and Local Honey

Is there anything more luxurious than fresh-baked biscuits on a weekend morning? Pair with your favorite tea or coffee and a good book.

Pro Tip: You can make your lemon curd in advance and keep in the fridge for up to 10 days. Use with scones, biscuits, cake or by the spoonful!

Buttermilk Biscuits:
4 C. all purpose flour
2 Tb. sugar
2 tsp. salt



3 Tb. baking powder
14-oz. of butter, grated, frozen (3½ sticks)
2 C. buttermilk

Preheat oven to 400°. Mix dry ingredients—flour, sugar, salt, baking powder—and mix. Add butter, then buttermilk and knead together gently just until the dough comes together.

Roll out dough on a floured surface to 1-inch thickness. Cut into desired shape.

Bake on an oiled cookie sheet at 400° for 18–20 minutes until golden. Let biscuits rest for 5 minutes before serving.

Serves 6.



Citrus Curd:
1 each lemon, lime, orange, all juiced and zested, approximately 10-oz. (1¼ C.) juice total
8 oz. butter (1 stick)
2 C. sugar
4 large eggs, beaten

Place zest, juice, sugar and butter in a heatproof bowl. Place on top of a simmering pot of water to create double boiler. Heat until butter is melted and sugar is dissolved.

Remove from heat and whisk in eggs. Place back over low heat and stir constantly until curd thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon. Remove from heat and let it cool completely.

Serve as shown with biscuits and local honey.

Serves 4.
(Mae's likes Nick's Honey from Unionville). ♦

Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.



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