

Journey into the Heart of Maria's Garden

OBSESSIVE GROWER, COOK, EATER AND PRESERVER CARRIES ON THE FAMILY LEGACY

Courtney H. Diener-Stokes

WHEN I THINK OF WOMEN LEADERS IN OUR region worthy of recognition for their role in food, Maria Rodale is among the first to come to mind. Maria is known for her personal and professional work, which has centered on continuing the mission set out by her grandfather and father over 75 years ago as pioneers of organic farming.

The Rodale legacy — ranging from organic farming institutes across the nation to publishing in the health and wellness sector — is one that inspired Maria to author six books, helm Rodale Press as its CEO for 10 years and currently serve on the Board of the Rodale Institute in Kutztown.

A prolific gardener and cook, Maria continues to inspire in her unique way, most recently through her latest book, *Love, Nature, Magic: Shamanic journeys into the heart of my garden*. In this book, she shares her new, more spiritual relationship with gardening that has greatly impacted her approach and liberated her in the process.

Ten years ago, Maria's interest in shamanic journeying, a way of communicating with your inner or spirit self to the rhythmic sound of a drum to discover insights, was tied into her CEO role that required her to explore the edges of health, wellness and the environment. Along the way, she began applying what she learned to her personal life, transforming the way she gardens and interacts with nature. "I found through the process that what we have been taught about nature and how we landscape and garden have nothing to do with what nature really wants," she says.

This newfound awareness, which involves the engagement of her inner wisdom and a collaborative approach, led her from striving to achieve a perfectly designed garden to actually listening to it. "If we ask, nature responds by creating this amazing abundance," she says.

Last year Maria decided to stop weeding her garden and found it to be just as beautiful with weeds as without. She finds this relaxed

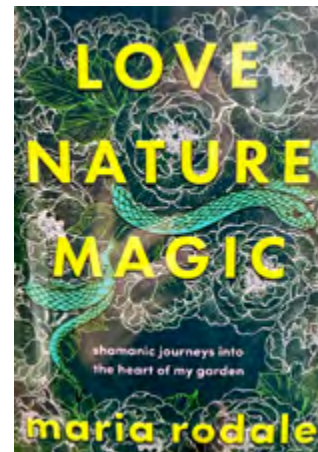


Maria Rodale

approach towards growing food to be much more joyful and fun than one centered on control, order and fear. "Nature wants to be wild and wants freedom," she says. "It took me decades to learn that I'm not the one in control."

Maria's time in the kitchen these days is centered on a diet that's free of refined sugars and gluten, and low in salt. A self-professed obsessive grower, cook, eater and preserver, Maria enjoys cooking for her three daughters and two grandchildren just as much as she enjoys cooking for herself. Right now she's craving a salad made using freshly picked greens.

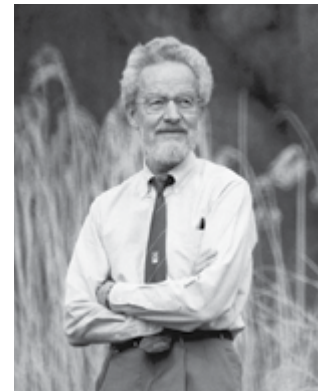
Read on for some no-fuss recipes that make use of early goodies from the garden.



RODALE IMAGES COURTESY RODALE FAMILY



J.I. Rodale, grandfather



Robert Rodale, father

Savory Slice

Denser than a quiche or frittata, this popular Australian crustless snack is a blank, savory canvas, says Maria. You can plan your delicious meal around this dish by switching up ingredients based on when things are at their prime in your garden. The idea of a slice is that it's an easy piece of something to eat now or later, hot or cold. Once cooked, the slice can be cut into pieces and frozen to have handy when you need a quick breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Makes 8 to 10 pieces (depending on size)



- 6 slices of bacon or other meat (sausage or ham), fully cooked
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 C. flour (Maria uses gluten-free, cup for cup)
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 6 eggs
- 1 C. grated cheddar cheese
- ¼ C. grated Romano cheese
- 2 C. chopped spring greens (kale or vegetables of your choice, such as mushrooms, broccoli or shredded zucchini — with water squeezed out)
- 1 large or 2 small potatoes, cubed
- Olive oil for the pan, plus more for optional drizzle

Preheat oven to 375°. Chop cooked meat into small pieces and set aside. Use some fat from the cooked meat to sautee onion over medium heat in a frying pan until translucent.

Road Trip to the Rodale Institute

Instead of joining the 350,000 Rodale Institute website visitors (where you can take a virtual tour), consider a road trip to Kutztown, where the farm is a "destination for inspiration."

Less than a 90-minute drive from West Chester, Rodale Institute has been conducting groundbreaking research on regenerative organic agriculture since 1947. It's widely recognized as the birthplace of the organic movement in the U.S. In 1971, the original headquarters in Emmaus was moved and is now on a 386-acre certified organic farm in Kutztown, with seven satellite campuses in North America and Europe.

Self-guided walking tours of Rodale Institute are available for free year-round with no reservation necessary and provide an opportunity to explore the farm at your own pace. When you arrive, pick up a map of the farm at the Garden Store or Main Office or download a map online along with audio tracks keyed to stops on the walking tour map — apple orchard, greenhouses, demonstration gardens, industrial hemp, honeybee conservancy and more.

Guided golf-cart tours of the farm are offered on Thursdays, rain or shine, from May through October, pre-registration required (\$12.50). Educational workshops and online courses are also ongoing at the site along with Rodale's Field Days, which offer hands-on experiential learning.

Be on the lookout for Rodale's Spring Organic Market and Plant Sale happening in May. The sale features Rodale's certified organic vegetable, herb and flower starts — including heirloom and other unique varieties — plus expert gardening advice.

611 Siegfriedale Rd., Kutztown. For more, RodaleInstitute.org.



In a medium bowl, mix flour, baking powder, eggs and cheeses. (This will have a thick and sticky consistency.)

Add the chopped greens/vegetables, onion, potato and meat. Stir together until evenly mixed.

Grease a 9" x 13" pan with olive oil. Place mixture in pan and press the top to make it even.

Bake for 40 minutes until cooked through and firm to the touch.

Once cooked, drizzle olive oil on top, if you like.

To freeze leftovers, Maria places each slice in a parchment snack bag and then in a large freezer bag.

Date Energy Balls

Dates, nuts and vanilla come together in Maria's favorite go-to snack that's free of refined sugars. When the dates are ground up in a food processor, they become the glue that binds these no-bake balls together. Pairs beautifully with a trail walk or picnic.

Makes 10 to 12 balls, depending on size



- 1/3 C. pitted dates
- 1/3 C. nut of choice (pecans, cashews, almonds)
- 1/3 C. dried fruit of choice (cranberries, cherries, apricots — without any added sweetener)
- 1 dash of vanilla
- Coconut, cocoa powder or matcha for coating, optional

Add all ingredients, except for coconut, cocoa powder or matcha, to a food processor and pulse until mixture is blended and broken down into small bits.

Pour the mixture into a bowl. Press and roll small scoops together with your hands forming small balls.

Roll balls in the coconut, cocoa powder or matcha coating, if you'd like. Be creative!

Refrigerate leftovers in a sealed container for up to one week.

Chocolate Banana Soft Serve

Maria had a stroke in 2022 that led her to give up refined sugars and get creative about making healthier sweets to replace some of her prior cravings, such as ice cream. This alternative to ice cream uses over-ripened bananas that have been frozen. The end product is so sweet you don't need to add any sugar! And the texture will remind you of soft serve ice cream. Works well as a standalone snack when you're craving something sweet, and it rounds out any meal in need of a dessert.

Serves 1 to 2



- 2 frozen bananas
- 1 T. dried, unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/2 C. milk

Freeze unpeeled bananas on the verge of over-ripening. After freezing, peel and break bananas into smaller pieces. Place in a food processor.

Add cocoa powder and blend until smooth. Add milk, a small amount at a time, to assist blending.

Eat immediately! Not recommended to store any leftovers.

Spring Mix Salad with Easy Vinaigrette

Maria's go-to salad puts to good use any greens you have coming up in your garden. Sometimes she adds nuts and creamy goat cheese for texture and protein. She might even add wild violets growing in her backyard for a pop of color. The no-fuss, light vinaigrette is made with just three ingredients — directly in the salad bowl. Pairs well with a simple dinner that could use some greens to round it out.

Serves 2 to 3



For the dressing:

- 1 T. red wine or sherry vinegar
- 3 T. olive oil
- 1 pinch of salt

For the salad:

- 3 C. loosely packed fresh greens, washed and patted dry
- 6 baby radishes, sliced
- Goat cheese, avocado, nuts, wild violets, fresh herbs, optional

In a medium salad bowl, add the dressing ingredients. Next, add greens. Hand toss to evenly coat with dressing. Garnish with radishes and any additional optional ingredients.

Asparagus and Lemon Cream Pasta

This pasta dish is from Maria's cookbook, *Scratch: Home Cooking for Everyone Made Simple, Fun and Delicious*. It's a great way to use the bounty of local asparagus that's just around the corner. Maria loves making this fresh, creamy and delicious dish when entertaining or if she wants to make a quick and easy vegetarian dinner. Pairs well with a glass of rosé or pinot grigio wine.

Serves 4

- 1 lb. linguine
- 2 T. extra virgin olive oil
- 2 T. butter
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and cut into thirds
- 1 C. heavy (whipping) cream



1 lemon, for zest and juice

Salt, to taste

Chopped fresh mint and Italian parsley leaves, for serving

Grated romano cheese, for serving

Cook the linguine according to package instructions.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet, heat the oil and butter over medium-low heat. Add the onion and garlic, and cook for 4 to 5 minutes, until soft.

Add the asparagus and stir to combine. Add the cream. Increase the heat to medium and bring to a simmer, stirring occasionally.

Finely grate the lemon zest into the sauce, reserving the lemon.

Drain the pasta and add to the skillet. Toss to combine and cook until just heated through. Remove from heat.

Halve the lemon and squeeze the juice of the whole lemon over the pasta.

Salt to taste and garnish with mint and parsley. Pass grated Romano cheese at the table.

Refrigerate leftovers in an air-tight container for up to three days. ♦

Courtney Diener-Stokes is an award-winning journalist, author, food writer, photographer and food stylist. Most recently she co-authored the *Kimberton Whole Foods Cookbook* and *Farmhouse Manna: Nourishing Recipes and Rituals for Head, Heart, Hands & Soul*. She lives in the Oley Valley countryside with her husband, three children, two Babydoll Southdown sheep, a flock of bantam chickens and a Bernedoodle named Daisy.



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