

Add Some Spice to Your Summer Menu!

SAUCES, RUBS AND DRESSINGS ARE KEYS TO VIBRANT FLAVORS.

Courtney H. Diener-Stokes



John Alff, owner of Vesta Kitchen



NOW THAT WE'RE IN THE thick of summer, you've likely been putting your grill to good use. And we hope you've found time to gather with friends and family as you indulge in the bounty from your garden and local farmers markets.

While grilling offers a great way to switch up the monotony of cooking inside in your kitchen, standard fare like steak and grilled chicken — even with mixed green salads and baked potatoes — can get old pretty fast. The key to enlivening your menu is spicing it up with robust flavors that will make your dishes unforgettable.

To up your summer menu game, begin with a pantry stocked with seasonings and sauces, like a Moroccan spice rub for meats and vegetables, a salsa verde to toss with potatoes, or a roasted garlic dressing to add pizzazz to salads. We're talking easy dishes that can be enhanced simply by adding spices and sauces. "You can transform simple ingredients, like vegetables, into something more exciting if you have the right pantry items," said John Alff, owner of **Vesta Kitchen**, which has a new brick-and-mortar location in Pottstown.

This is what inspired Alff, a father of three young kids, to make ready-to-go, field-to-fork meals. It's like having a helper in your kitchen who's sourcing from Chester County farms

you likely know and love, such as Kneehigh Farm, Pasture Song Farm, Horse Shoe Ranch and Birchrun Hills Farm. "You know all our ingredients are locally and responsibly sourced, and I put my spin on them and do all the work," added Alff. Sounds pretty tempting this time of year!

Between summer vacations, camp car-pool for kids and work demands, it can be challenging to find the time to keep up with the day-to-day cooking that's involved with feeding a family. And who has the time for making your own fermented hot sauce, pickling onions or dehydrating oregano to add to your pantry?

That was a motivating factor behind Vesta's products — to help you stock up on things you don't have time to make from scratch. Plus these deliver the quality and freshness of homemade go-to items like hot sauces, barbecue sauces, dressings and chutneys.

If you do make the time to shop at local farmers markets, your visits will also serve as a great chance to get to know who's growing your food. By talking with the growers, you'll find more ways to showcase what small Pennsylvania farmers and producers have to offer each season.

Read on for some simple and versatile recipes Alff recommends you try at home that can breathe new life into your summer menu!

Salsa Verde

Packing just the right amount of heat, this salsa can be served with tortilla chips, added as a topping for your favorite tacos or burritos, used as marinade for chicken, or tossed in with roasted potatoes. Red Dog Market in South Coventry is an ideal destination to stock up on locally grown produce from Kneehigh Farm for this recipe.

Serves 2 to 4 as a dip or used as a topping or marinade



- 4 poblano peppers
- 12 tomatillos, cut in half (about 1.5 lbs.)
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped (about 1.5-2 C.)
- 1 small jalapeño, stem and seeds removed (or half for mild)
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 T. salt
- 1 large bunch cilantro, leaves picked and washed

Preheat oven to 475°. Roast poblanos until they start to char, about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove and immediately place in a container with a tight-fitting lid. Once cool enough to handle, scrape off the skin and remove stems and seeds. Set aside.

Add tomatillos, onion, jalapeño, garlic, salt and poblanos to food processor. Buzz until smooth.

Add cilantro to food processor and buzz until incorporated into salsa. Add more salt to taste.

Refrigerate leftovers in an airtight container for up to five days.

Buffalo Carrot Dip

Here's a dip where you control the heat factor. It's the perfect lead-up to any meal when you're entertaining outdoors. Pairs perfectly with celery or crackers.

Serves 2 to 4

- 1 lb. carrots, peeled and chopped
- ½ C. plain yogurt (Seven Stars Farm recommended)



¼-½ C. Vesta's 'Tangled Up in Blue' Hot Sauce, or chef's choice (use ½ C. for extra spicy)

1 T. salt

¼ C. blue cheese, for crumbing on top (Birchrun Hills recommended)

Place carrots in a medium pot, cover with water and boil until fully cooked and soft, about 8 to 10 minutes. Strain carrots, but reserve cooking liquid.

Place carrots, yogurt, hot sauce and salt in food processor and buzz until smooth. Add reserved carrot cooking liquid if needed for a smooth dip consistency. Taste to adjust salt and hot sauce levels.

Place in serving bowl and top with blue cheese crumbles.

Refrigerate leftovers in an airtight container for up to two days.

Moroccan Spice Rub

Both savory and sweet, this rub is ideal on beef, lamb or chicken (Lindenbott Farm's meats are recommended), as well as on roasted or grilled vegetables. You'll be happy to have leftovers to use in the Roasted Beet and Grain Salad (next recipe).

Serves 3 to 4 as a rub when grilling meat

- 2 T. whole coriander seeds
- 2 T. whole cumin seeds
- 1 tsp. smoked paprika
- 2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 T. chili powder
- 2 T. fresh thyme leaves, picked off stem

Place coriander and cumin seeds in a saute pan on stove over medium heat. Toast spices, stirring occasionally, until you smell them becoming aromatic.

Place toasted coriander and cumin seeds in the bowl of a mortar and grind them with a pestle until all seeds are cracked, but don't let them become a powder.



Add all other ingredients, including coriander and cumin, into a container with a tight-fitting lid. Shake container to mix ingredients.
Store with your spice collection and use within six months.

**Roasted Beet & Grain Salad with
Roasted Garlic Dressing**

This seasonal salad, featuring farro by Castle Valley Farm and greens by Full Circle CSA, lets you put many garden goodies to use. Pairs well with any protein on the grill. If the summer heat is dampening your appetite, this salad can serve as a refreshing and hearty meal by itself.



- Serves 3 to 4
- For the Salad:**
3 large beets, red, golden or a combo, washed, trimmed of leaves and stem
Salt and pepper to taste
Olive oil
3 sprigs thyme
6 cloves garlic
¼ C. water
1 C. Hakurei turnips, cut into bite-size pieces (or chef’s choice of turnip)
1 C. carrots, cut into bite-size pieces
1–2 T. Moroccan Spice Rub (recipe in this article)
4–5 C. salad greens, packed, washed and dried
½ C. farro, cooked per instructions on package (Castle Valley Mill recommended)
3–4 radishes, sliced thin
2 T. toasted pumpkin seeds
¼ C. feta

- For the Roasted Garlic Dressing:**
12 garlic cloves
¾ C. olive oil
¼ C. vinegar, champagne vinegar or merlot vinegar (Keepwell Vinegar recommended)
1 tsp. salt
Pinch black pepper

To make the salad:
Preheat oven to 350°. Place beets in a mixing bowl and toss with salt, pepper and olive oil until fully coated. Tear off enough aluminum foil to make a pouch to hold all the beets and that can be folded to close securely.
Place garlic cloves, thyme sprigs and water in foil. Lay the seasoned beets on top and securely fold the pouch closed. Place the pouch on a sheet tray in the oven for at least two hours.
In a mixing bowl, toss turnips and carrots with olive oil, salt and Moroccan Spice Rub. Put on a sheet tray and roast in oven about 25 to 30 minutes.

Check the beets by giving them a squeeze (they’re done when they feel slightly soft). Remove from the oven when fully cooked.
While the beets are still warm, use a paper towel to remove skins, which should slide right off. Dice beets into bite-size pieces and set aside.
To assemble salad, put salad greens in a serving bowl. Top with cooked farro. Arrange sliced radishes and roasted beets, carrots and turnips on top of the salad. Sprinkle toasted pumpkin seeds and crumbled feta over top.
Just before serving, drizzle the dressing over the salad.

To make the dressing:
Place 12 garlic cloves in a small pot and cover with olive oil. Simmer over low heat until garlic is soft. Strain the garlic and oil and reserve the roasted garlic oil.
Place roasted garlic, vinegar, salt and pepper in a blender and

**Local Farms & Markets
to Visit**

Here are some local farms that are open to customer visits, as well as brick-and-mortar markets that offer a diverse selection from local growers and producers.

Seven Stars Farm
A biodynamic farm where you can find yogurt, cheese and beef for sale in their farm store.
419 W. Seven Stars Rd., Phoenixville
610-935-1949; SevenStarsFarm.com
Mon–Fri, 9 to 5; Sat, 9 to 4.

Birchrun Hills Farm
Offers a large variety of artisan farmstead cheeses.
1020 Davis Ln., Chester Springs
484-798-4023; BirchrunHillsFarm.com
Wed & Thurs, noon to 5; Fri, noon to 8.

Vesta Kitchen
Field-to-fork dinners to take home and heat up, plus a full line of pantry items made using locally sourced ingredients.
50 Glocker Way, Pottstown
215-620-0453; VestaKitchenPA.com
Wed–Fri, 11 to 6; Sat, 9 to 2.

Red Dog Market
Find vegetables, fruits, raw and organic dairy, grass-fed and pasture-raised meat, fresh bread and more from local farms and producers, including Pasture Song Farm, Kneehigh Farm, Dove Song Dairy, Horse Shoe Ranch and Castle Valley Mill.
1503 Ridge Rd., Pottstown
484-587-3726; RedDogMarketPA.com
Wed–Sat, 11 to 6.

turn on low, blending until all ingredients are pureed.
Slowly add the reserved garlic oil to the blender to emulsify into a dressing.
Store in a jar with a tight-fitting lid for up to three days.

Pulled Pork Chili

Since the start of football season is on the horizon, this chili featuring pork by Pasture Song Farm can serve as your go-to recipe when friends or family come to watch a game. Top with shredded cheddar, sour cream and scallions. Serve with your favorite cornbread or on top of a baked potato.

- Serves 4 to 6
- 2 C. onion, diced
2 C. bell pepper, diced



- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
¼ C. olive oil
1 T. salt
1 T. chili powder
1 T. cumin
1 T. oregano
½ T. paprika
2 C. crushed tomatoes
2 C. pulled pork
1 C. chicken or pork stock
1 C. cooked beans, red or black
½ C. cilantro, chopped

In a large pot, saute onion, bell pepper and garlic with olive oil and salt.
When peppers and onions are soft, stir in the chili powder, cumin, oregano and paprika.
Stir in the crushed tomatoes and pulled pork. Add stock as needed to create desired consistency.
Let simmer on low, stirring occasionally, about 20 to 30 minutes. Stir in beans and chopped cilantro.
Taste for seasoning, and add salt if necessary.
Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to five 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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