



GUIDE MAGAZINE

Chef Devin Mills, Peekamoose Restaurant

By Karin Ursula Edmondson

What are some products—vegetable, fruit, meat, cheese, value-added—that you think are unique to the region, that might define the regional Catskill cuisine?

Tomatoes, apples, pears, arugula, cauliflower, green beans, goat cheese, potatoes, beets, grass-fed beef, rabbit, trout. The real benefit: that these items are available practically in our backyard. There is a thrill in serving something that was literally pulled from the ground only hours before, knowing that I couldn't possibly serve it fresher.

If you were going to cook a meal—in September—that represented the Catskill Region, what would it be?

- Cheddar Cauliflower Flan with sautéed pea shoots, truffled beet jus
- Roasted puréed Chestnut soup garnished with crispy, pan-fried Brussels sprout leaves.
- Local trout, served with a locally grown cabbage braised in red wine, red wine vinegar, and a touch of sugar for a 'sweet and sour' effect and finished with a smoked fumet,
- Sweet corn slow-churned ice cream sandwiched between cookies of honey and butter-sweetened corn flakes.

The Catskills are being identified with foraged foods: nettles, ramps, fiddleheads, sorrel, wild arugula. How often do these foods make it onto your menu? Are diners usually receptive?

Foraging seems such a basic, primal means of gathering foods for sustenance. There's something wonderfully fun about picking your dinner from the ground on the same day it's to be eaten, reminding me about how fresh food is supposed to taste, all the time. The seasonality of these items makes it even more special. Knowing there's a two week window of opportunity to have a particular ingredient makes it such a vital component to our menu. Most of our guests are more than familiar with these items on our menu: often, they are the ones bringing us the surplus of their own foraging hikes. Some carefully guard their 'secret locations' for ramps, others invite us to join them in the gathering. We were never invited to go foraging when we lived and worked in Manhattan, so when we moved up here, we considered it the best perk of our lifestyle change from city to country living.

Which Catskill farms particularly catch your fancy?

We adore Bob and Sandy Kiley's wonderful produce—some of the best tasting vegetables—at RSK Farms. Bob stops by weekly, to discuss the qualities of his products and how we use them. He grows certain lettuces for our specific needs. He is

genuinely excited by the culinary transformation of what comes out of his soil. Lucky Dog Farms for organic and incredibly tasty and beautiful produce; Heller Farms for the best tasting peaches; Sap Bush Hollow's chorizo for our fisherman's stew; Beaverkill Trout Hatchery for terrific brown trout.



Photo by Marybeth Mills

I recall an article in The New York Times about New York City chefs who contract with local farms to raise animals according to specific dietary instructions to feed the animals to ensure meat with particular texture, flavor hints etc. Have you ever partnered with local farmers in regards to custom-raised livestock?

We just began discussing a relationship such as this with the Frost Valley YMCA and their agricultural/farm program: a great place to start a cross-cooperative effort with livestock and produce, as they too, foster a learning environment and are committed to increasing awareness of the Catskill's bounty. We would dictate the diet of the animals, as well as their care, while subsidizing the Farm Camp for youth to learn more about farming and agriculture.

Why the Catskills?

With Marybeth: When we think back to our lives in the New York City restaurant business, we think that our only connection with our ingredients was via the truck driver who delivered them. Here, we know our farmers on a first name basis and learn about desired rainfall, pesky insects and the rockiness of the soil. It is incredible to have a neighbor show up in garden clogs and overalls, sporting a basket of organic garlic. I see the dirt under her fingernails, and see how proud she is of her harvest. I think of the local cheese maker, a true artist, if there ever was one. The 4-H club picks ramps for us in the rain. I love the memory of my first truly local tomato, a reminder of why they are classified as a fruit, and not a vegetable. I love that I shop at a place with an honor box and a sign to sample some homemade rhubarb jam.

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