

Roasted beet baked Alaska, \$9,  
Executive Pastry Chef Ryan  
Witcher, Ritz-Carlton  
Washington, D.C. RECIPE, p. 84.

# sweet greens

Vegetables sprout up  
in desserts by Seánan Forbes

**I**f only every parent thought about stashing beets in a slice of chocolate cake, more kids might've turned out like Johnny Iuzzini, executive pastry chef of Jean-Georges in New York City. As a boy, he hated beets, but a piece of chocolate beet cake forever changed him. "It was delicious," he says. "The natural flavors from the beets were so sweet and earthy, and worked really well in conjunction with the chocolate."

He also hated rhubarb—except when his mother cooked it with wild strawberries. Then, "something magical took place; they created a new flavor."

Building on those lessons, luzzini incorporates vegetables into a variety of desserts. In different seasons, he's made pumpkin pine nut cake, honey-roasted tomatoes with lemon-basil and rhubarb-flan tarts with mustard-rhubarb jam.

Ritz-Carlton Washington, D.C. Executive Pastry Chef Ryan Witcher also gets the flavor appeal chocolate and beets. His roasted beet baked Alaska flaunts beet ice cream (\$9, recipe, p. 84). "I like the sugar content of beets, and the more you roast them, the more natural sugar comes out," he says, adding, "and roasting beets intensifies their color."

Monica Pope, chef-owner of t'afia in Houston, also understands what vegetables do in dessert. She offers guests butternut squash white chocolate macaroons with candied sage, walnuts and blue cheese. "We appreciate all those flavors in a dessert, something a little pungent, a little spicy, a little salty, a little sweet, without it being cloying," Pope says.

## SELLING THE GREEN

At June, an organic restaurant in Peoria Heights, Ill., Executive Chef Josh Adams looks to his root cellar for chai parsnip ice cream (\$3, recipe, [plateonline.com](http://plateonline.com)). "Parsnips have a complex sweetness with different vanilla and floral notes" says Adams. "And the chai pulls the natural spices of parsnip, they blend really nicely." Adams' regulars know the kitchen, and are open to trying new things.

But to get there with your guests, trust is important. So is wording in the menu, says Megan Garrelts, pastry chef and co-

owner of Bluestem in Kansas City, Mo. If you're offering something unusual, be careful to make the dessert sound appealing. "The bottom line is to please guests. Sell food and make money," she notes.

Garrelts also suggests understanding your market. "If you feature tomatoes in your dessert, and that's all you're featuring, without something familiar, it can scare guests," she says. "I try to make it a complement to a main ingredient." To that end, her textures of carrot cake starts with carrot cake, and veers off into carrot ginger sorbet, carrot gel, cinnamon

bubbles, honey-poached carrots and walnut nougatine (\$9, recipe, [plateonline.com](http://plateonline.com)).

Karen Barker, pastry chef and co-owner of Magnolia Grill in Durham, N.C., serves cornmeal ricotta pound cake with a green tomato apple conserve (\$8.95, recipe, right). The tomatoes aren't the main component, but they are key. "Green tomatoes in dessert is an old-timey, Southern thing," she says. "But when [they are] the main component, customers [are] afraid they won't like it. But pound cake is familiar, and they're willing to be exploratory in terms of garnishes."

## CRISPER TO FREEZER

Michael Devlin, pastry chef at Dressing Room: A Homegrown Restaurant in Westport, Conn., says ice creams and sorbets are great vehicles for showcasing fresh, local vegetables. In the summer, when the garden is overgrown with cucumbers, Devlin turns them into

## SWEET PAIRINGS

Andrew Dornenburg and Karen Page, authors of *The Flavor Bible, Culinary Artistry and What to Drink with What You Eat*, (Little, Brown and Company, 2008) are masters of matchmaking in the kitchen. Here are some of their picks:

**CELERY:** apple and candied walnuts

**EGGPLANT:** apple and apple pie spices

**FENNEL:** apple

**RHUBARB:** strawberries and vanilla; cinnamon and walnuts; ricotta and vanilla

**SWEET POTATOES:** cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla; maple syrup and pecans; cranberries and dates



## Toasted cornmeal ricotta pound cake with green tomato conserve and buttermilk sabayon

Chef-Co-Owner Karen Barker, Magnolia Grill, Durham, N.C.

Menu price: \$8.95; food cost/serving: 25%

Yield: 16 servings

Butter, room temperature	as needed
Cornmeal	as needed
Flour	3 C
Baking powder	1 1/2 tsp
Kosher salt	1/2 tsp
Yellow cornmeal	3/4 C
Orange, large, zest of	1 each
Sugar	2 3/4 C, plus 1/3 C



Eggs, large, at room temperature	5 each
Ricotta cheese, whole milk	1 C
Vanilla extract	1 TBS
Sugar	1/3 C
Orange juice	1/3 C
Green tomato apple conserve (see note)	as needed
Buttermilk sabayon (see note)	as needed

1. Butter a 12-cup Bundt pan and coat with cornmeal, tapping out excess.
2. Sift flour and baking powder. Add kosher salt and yellow cornmeal to mixture. Reserve.
3. In a mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream 12 ounces butter with orange zest. Gradually add 2 3/4 cup sugar and beat until light. Add eggs 1 at a time, scrap-

ing bowl between additions. Alternately add reserved dry ingredients with ricotta. Mix until combined. Add vanilla extract. Transfer batter to prepared pan.

4. Bake at 350 degrees F for about 65 minutes, or until cake is golden brown, springy to touch and tests done. Cool cake in pan for 15 minutes before turning out and glazing.

5. To make glaze, combine 1/3 cup sugar and orange juice in a small sauté pan and heat over medium heat until sugar dissolves. Turn partially cooled pound cake out onto a wire rack placed over a rimmed baking sheet. Brush warm glaze over warm cake. Cool cake completely.

6. To serve, lightly toast slices of pound cake to order and accompany it with a spoonful of conserve and a dollop of sabayon.

Note: For green tomato apple conserve and buttermilk sabayon, see [plateonline.com](http://plateonline.com)

sorbet. "It's very simple," he says. You just juice cucumbers and combine them with simple syrup. "It's very similar to watermelon—but more delicious."

To make corn ice cream, Devlin juices corn, steeps the cobs overnight in hot cream and mixes the two for an ice cream base. The result is an intensely corn-flavored cream. "You could roast the corn," Devlin says, "to get a roasted corn ice cream. It can be almost like a popcorn ice cream. It's a lot of fun."

Chucky Dugo, executive pastry chef of San Francisco's Slanted Door Group, also gets the sweet-savory crossover as with his chilled cherry tomatoes with buttermilk sorbet (\$9, recipe, [plateonline.com](http://plateonline.com)). While the tastes suit the Slanted Door's Vietnamese menu, the dessert's familiarity is visual, rooted in Italy: yellow, orange and red tomatoes, mozzarella and basil.

Such subtle uses of vegetable components add complexity. At Jin Patisserie, in Venice, Calif., Chef-Owner Kristy Choo makes *toupet de legumes*, a dark chocolate featuring black tea mixed with zucchini flowers and tomatoes.



"It has the tomato skin flavor, so it is sweet and sour. The zucchini flower adds fragrance," a vital component of taste. Choo imagines using tomatoes with a vanilla bavaroise. "You can't be afraid to try new stuff."

Seánan Forbes' favorite vegetable desserts are taro ice cream and fennel-blood orange sorbet. ✨ For recipes from this article and more visit, [plateonline.com](http://plateonline.com).