

Flavors from the Garden

Heirloom Vegetable Recipes from Roughwood



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Rizzoli



Saffron Corn Soup

The Pennsylvania Dutch have been cooking with saffron since the 1730s, when it was introduced as a cottage industry. Saffron soon crept into regional cookery and became a classic addition to chicken corn soup. This recipe takes that traditional idea a few steps farther by blending the freshness of sweet corn, fall harvest vegetables, and the rich flavor of saffron into a farmhouse soup with a dash of spicy Merkén sauce. It is the perfect starter soup for Thanksgiving, or the local Pennsylvania Dutch equivalent called Harvest Home; furthermore, it is elegant, light, and easy to make even with vegetable stock.

Serves 6 to 8

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 medium onion, coarsely chopped

3 cups thinly sliced leek (white part only)

3 cups grated white sweet corn, cobs reserved

2 cups peeled and chopped potato

6 cups chicken or vegetable stock

½ teaspoon powdered saffron

1 cup finely diced carrot

2 teaspoons sugar, optional (depending on sweetness of corn)

2 teaspoons sea salt, or to taste

1 cup Merkén Sauce (page 73), for serving

Sliced chives, for garnish

In a deep stewing pan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the onion and leek, cover, and sweat until the vegetables are soft but not changing color, about 5 minutes. Add the grated corn, reserved cobs, potatoes, and stock. Cover and stew until all the ingredients are tender, about 30 minutes. Discard cobs.

Transfer the cooked vegetables and liquid to a food processor or blender and puree until thick and smooth, working in batches if necessary. Transfer to a deep work bowl and stir in the saffron.

Bring a small saucepan of water to a rapid boil over medium-high heat. Add the diced carrot and cook just until tender, about 3 minutes. Drain and add the carrots to the puree. Add the sugar, if using, and salt, and adjust seasoning.

Serve the soup chilled or reheat and serve hot. Dot or drizzle *merkén* sauce over each serving and garnish with chives.

Merkén

Merkén is a smoky-spicy seasoning blend, created by the Mapuche tribe of southern Chile. It has become so popular with South American chefs it can now be found online, but it's rewarding to make your own. The Chilean *Cabro de Cacha* (Goat Horn) pepper is a member of the *Capsicum annuum* species, which means that it is related to the common bell pepper. For this reason, it is easy to grow and will produce huge yields of fruit from August until frost. The traditional process for merkén involves drying whole peppers in the sun for days until brittle. Once thoroughly dried, the peppers are then cold-smoked over wood fires. The smoked peppers get seeded and crushed into small flakes, then milled into a fine powder. The powdered pepper is then mixed with salt, ground coriander, and a small amount of ground cumin for merkén. For the adventurous, Roughwood has been growing the *Cabro de Cacha* pepper for several years and they're fun to smoke. As an alternative, use ground chipotle cut with paprika.

Makes about ¾ cup

8 tablespoons ground cold-smoked *Cabro de Cacha* pepper (see Note); or
6 tablespoons paprika mixed with 2
tablespoons ground chipotle pepper

1½ tablespoons fine sea salt

1 tablespoon ground coriander

2 teaspoons ground cumin

Combine the pepper or paprika–chipotle pepper mix, salt, coriander, and cumin in a small mixing bowl. Pour into a ziplock bag and seal. Store in an airtight container away from direct sunlight for up to 1 year.

Merkén Sauce

Makes 1 cup

1 large red bell pepper, seeded and
chopped

½ cup cleaned and trimmed sliced
leek (white part only)

2 teaspoons merkén (this page) or
ground chipotle pepper

1 teaspoon sea salt

In a small saucepan, combine the bell pepper, leek, and merkén powder with 1 cup water over medium-high heat. Cover and bring just to a rolling boil, then remove from the heat and let stand 30 minutes for the vegetables to infuse. Transfer to a food processor or blender and puree the mixture until thick, then press it through a conical strainer or chinoise until smooth. Season with salt. This sauce can be made ahead and frozen for later use.