



GRILLING VEGETABLES

Smoky Gazpacho

Makes about 2 quarts or 6 to 8 servings

1 pound ripe heirloom tomatoes (look for sweet and juicy varieties like Brandywine or Cherokee Purple), cored and quartered

1 large cucumber, peeled and chopped

1 red or yellow bell pepper, stem and seeds removed

1 onion, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 clove garlic, peeled

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar or red wine vinegar

Kosher salt

Lemon-infused olive oil

Place all the vegetables (including the garlic, if raw) on a small flameproof baking sheet and set it on the grill adjacent to the coals of a small fire (see page 15). Add some strong flavored wood chips such as hickory or maple and cover the grill. Smoke for 3 to 5 minutes to just barely flavor the ingredients.

Place the tomatoes into a blender and use a spoon to lightly crush them to release some of their juices. Purée the tomatoes until smooth. This will provide the liquid necessary to purée the other ingredients.

Add the other vegetables along with the olive oil and vinegar, and season generously with salt. Purée until all the vegetables have broken down and the soup has a smooth consistency. You may need to add a little water, depending on the moisture content of the vegetables. If so, do this just a few spoonfuls at a time. Check the seasoning and adjust if necessary.

Grilled Snap Pea Salad with Onions and Mint

Serves 4

1 pound fresh sugar snap peas

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt

1 small red onion, thinly sliced vertically

Leaves from 8 sprigs fresh mint, torn

1 tablespoon white balsamic vinegar or red wine vinegar

Toss the peas with a little bit of the olive oil and a pinch of salt. Place them in a grill basket and set it directly over the coals of a small fire (see page 15) spiked with apple wood chips. When the peas begin to char and soften, about 7 minutes, remove the basket from the fire.

Place the peas into a bowl. Add the onion and toss to combine. Let the mixture sit for a minute or two so that the heat of the peas can gently soften the onion. Add the mint, vinegar, and remaining olive oil and season to taste with salt. Toss to combine and serve immediately.

Charred Okra with Smoky Onion Dip

Serves 4 as an appetizer

1 medium onion, diced
1 cup sour cream
1 tablespoon smoked paprika
1 bunch fresh chives, thinly sliced
Salt
24 large okra pods
Canola oil for brushing

For the dip, heat the butter in a heavy skillet over high heat. When the butter is brown, add the onion and let sit without stirring for a few minutes. The point is to char it in order to develop a deep, bittersweet flavor. After a few minutes, toss the onion and add a few tablespoons of water to deglaze the pan. This will release the charred bits and allow the sugars in the onion to stew as the water reduces, thus caramelizing and creating the flavor profile we want. After the water is evaporated, let the onion char again in the dry pan, then add a few more tablespoons of water. Cook until dry, then remove the pan from the heat. The onion should be dark brown but still have a little bit of texture. Allow it to cool, then mix in the sour cream, paprika, and chives, and season with salt.

Mix well to combine and let sit for 20 minutes so the flavors meld. The dip will keep, tightly covered, in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Thread 4 okra onto each bamboo skewer, leaving a little space between them. Brush the okra with oil and season generously with salt.

Prepare the grill with a medium fire. Cook the okra on the hottest part of the grill until the skin begins to char and slightly blister. Rotate the grill grate until the skewers are over the cool part of the grill; cover the grill and cook until tender throughout, about 4 minutes.

Remove the okra from the skewers and serve on a platter with the dip on the side.



Ember-roasted Eggplant Purée

Makes about 2 cups

1 large eggplant

Salt

1 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Prepare a medium fire. Nestle eggplant into embers and cook until thoroughly softened and charred. Let cool to room temperature.

Use a spoon to scrape out every last little bit of the eggplant from the skins. A lot of the flavor is close up against the skin. Place the eggplant flesh in a blender or a food processor and start to purée. Season to taste with salt, then, with the machine running, add the oil in a slow, steady drizzle, making sure that it is incorporated. When all the oil has been added, taste for seasoning and adjust, if necessary. Eggplant soaks up salt, so don't be afraid to keep adding a little more and a little more until it has a vibrant flavor. (This will keep, tightly covered, in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.)