

EAT SMART BE FIT LIVE WELL

# Cooking Light

AUGUST 2008

Grill  
the whole  
dinner!

the perfect **steak**

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## Sense of place

Southern Chef Chris Hastings champions local fare to keep regional flavors and traditions alive. **Story by Katherine Cobbs / Recipes by Chris Hastings**

Chef Chris Hastings's restaurant, Hot and Hot Fish Club in Birmingham, Alabama, is brimming with local flavor—on and off the menu. Art, ironwork, and furnishings reflect the city's artisans and his abiding interests, supporting community businesses. That passion is also obvious when you look at the menu. Farmstead cheeses, locally grown organic herbs and lettuces, and seafood from the nearby Gulf of Mexico are all given their proper appellation.

That's because Hastings seeks the best possible sources for the ingredients he weaves into his dishes, and when he discovers a great find, he gives credit where it's due. "We must credit

the source and be the billboard," he says. It's more than just a matter of spotlighting local purveyors; it's a chance to introduce the restaurant's clientele to foods they may not realize are available so close to home.

Through his involvement with the Council of Independent Restaurants of America, an organization that promotes locally owned restaurants in communities across the country, Hastings is an outspoken advocate of the valuable role independent restaurants play in every town. After all, these establishments— upscale eateries like Hot and Hot or down-home barbecue joints—provide patrons the opportunity to enjoy a taste

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of their own locale. By offering a dish steeped in regional history, for example, or showcasing a small boutique cheese company, privately run restaurants help keep traditions alive and turn grassroots operations into cottage industries.

It's not really a new concept, Hastings says, but one that is in danger of being forgotten. "Fewer folks cook at home every night like our mothers or grandmothers did. If you look at how food used to be prepared, it had more to do with your relationship to the local farmer, the seasons, or your own garden."

At Hot and Hot, celebrating that heritage doesn't mean churning out meals like Grandma used to make. What you taste there is fresh and new, yet pays homage to the past. An appetizer might combine such Southern staples as Gulf shrimp and corn bread with Latin ingredients like Anaheim chiles and ancho

### • Grilled Wild Salmon and Vegetables

You often can find different varieties of locally grown onions at farmers' markets and occasionally at supermarkets. Hastings likes to use specialty onions, including red torpedo, blanco de magis, and gold coin. Here, we call for more readily available varieties. Use a grill basket to cook the fish and vegetables.

- 8 fingerling potatoes (about 5 ounces)
- 4 small red onions, cut into 1-inch slices (about 1 pound)
- 4 Vidalia spring onions, quartered (about 8 ounces)
- 4 cipollini onions (about 4 ounces)
- 2 cups sliced fennel (about 7 ounces)
- 1 tablespoon extravirgin olive oil
- Cooking spray
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt, divided
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, divided
- 1 tablespoon chopped fennel fronds
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- 4 (6-ounce) salmon fillets
- 2 cups pea tendrils or baby spinach
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette (page 187)

1. Prepare grill.
2. Place potatoes in a large pan of boiling water; cook 8 minutes or until tender. Add onions and sliced fennel; cook 3 minutes or until onions are tender. Drain and plunge into ice water; drain.
3. Toss vegetables with oil. Place vegetables on grill rack coated with cooking spray; grill 4 minutes on each side or until tender and lightly browned. Sprinkle with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt,  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon pepper, fennel fronds, and parsley.
4. Sprinkle salmon with the remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt and remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon pepper. Place salmon on grill rack coated with cooking spray, and grill 5 minutes on each side or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork or until desired degree of doneness. Place 1 salmon fillet onto each of 4 plates. Toss pea tendrils with Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette. Place about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup pea tendril mixture over salmon. Add  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups grilled vegetables to each serving, and serve immediately. Yield: 4 servings.

CALORIES 327 (67% from fat); 90 (18.2%) fat; 41g (8.1%) protein; 2.6g (5.2%) total cholesterol; 24.5g (4.9%) total carbohydrate; 2.0g (4.0%) fiber; 1.5g (3.0%) sugar; 1.0g (2.0%) sodium

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#### ◀ Sweet Pea Risotto with Corn Broth

In Alabama, as elsewhere in the country, summer markets are full of fresh, locally grown corn. Hastings puts it to delicious use in this dish. We loved the Corn Broth and thought it would make a tasty summer soup all by itself.

##### CORN BROTH:

- 2½ cups water
- 2 cups fresh corn kernels
- ¼ teaspoon salt

##### RISOTTO:

- 3 cups organic vegetable broth (such as Swanson Certified Organic)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup uncooked arborio rice
- ½ cup diced onion
- 3 tablespoons minced carrot
- 3 tablespoons minced celery
- 2 cups fresh green peas
- 1 cup fresh corn kernels
- ½ cup diced fresh fennel
- 3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme

##### REMAINING INGREDIENTS:

- 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

chile paste. (The recipes here are adaptations for home cooks of dishes Hastings serves at Hot and Hot.)

Hastings says dining at independent restaurants is a way of supporting regional commerce, small farmers, and local businesses in one shot. "The restaurant is a part of a city's tapestry, and if we are not careful and fail to support those things that are great about our own hometowns, they will disappear," he says.

(For more on the trend of using locally produced foods, see "Buy Local," on page 112.)

Work by local artisans is showcased at the Hot and Hot Fish Club.



1. To prepare corn broth, combine 2½ cups water and 2 cups corn kernels in a small saucepan, bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer 5 minutes or until corn is tender. Stir in ¼ teaspoon salt. Place corn mixture in blender, process until smooth. Strain corn mixture through a sieve into a bowl, discard solids. Set aside, keep warm.

2. To prepare risotto, bring vegetable broth to a simmer in a medium saucepan (do not boil), keep warm over low heat. Heat butter in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add rice, cook 1 minute, stirring constantly. Add onion, carrot, and celery, cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add warm broth, ½ cup at a time, stirring constantly until each portion of broth is absorbed before adding the next (about 20 minutes). Add peas, 1 cup corn kernels, fennel, 2 tablespoons cheese, and thyme, stirring until blended and hot. Keep warm.

3. Combine vinegar, oil, sugar, ¼ teaspoon salt, and garlic in a small bowl, stirring with a whisk until blended. Place about ½ cup corn broth in each of 6 bowls. Top each serving with about 1½ cups risotto, drizzle with 1 teaspoon vinaigrette. Sprinkle each serving with 1 teaspoon cheese, ½ teaspoon parsley, and ½ teaspoon chives. Serve immediately. Yield: 6 servings.

CALORIES 200 (20% from fat) FAT 2.2g (sat 1.2g, mono 1.0g, poly 0.0g) PROTEIN 7.2g CARB 28.2g FIBER 1.2g SUGAR 1.2g SODIUM 52mg SALT 0.1g



## Five Ways to Eat Local

**Focus on seasonality.** Eat what's in season locally month to month by shopping at farm stands and planning meals around what is available and fresh at any given time.

**Network.** Chefs like Chris Hastings often champion local products and help patrons find a larger market. If you like something on a restaurant menu, ask the chef where it came from and how you can find it. Ask friends for their favorite local sources for ingredients.

**Go on a field trip.** Hop in the car and explore rural roads in your area to get a feel for what's out there—local honey, fruit from an orchard, and more. Local producers often operate farmstands, and some farmers even welcome visitors.

**Shop for local products online.** Visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Web site to find farms in your area that are part of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) database ([www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa)). Buy a share in a local farm, and reap the rewards with weekly produce deliveries.

**Dine locally.** To find innovative local restaurants in your city, check out the Council of Independent Restaurants' National Guide to Independent Restaurants ([www.dineonline.com](http://www.dineonline.com)). The site has guides to 18 cities, plus listings for dozens more.

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### Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette

Preserved lemons are lemons that have been preserved in salt and water. You can find them at gourmet and Middle Eastern markets, or prepare our recipe for Quick Preserved Lemons (available on [CookingLight.com](http://CookingLight.com)). Toss with salad greens.

- 2 tablespoons finely chopped preserved lemon, pith removed
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 1/2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon minced shallots

**1.** Combine all ingredients in a small bowl, stirring until blended. Yield: 1/2 cup (serving size: about 1 tablespoon).

CHOICES 24 (20% fat kcal), FAT 2.8g (sat 0.4g), mono 2g, poly 0.2g; PROTEIN 0g; CARB 0.7g; FIBER 0.1g; CHOL 0mg; NOSH 0mg; SODIUM 203mg; CAL 2mg

### Steamed Asparagus with Crayfish and Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette

In this recipe, Hastings celebrates the South's famous crayfish, also known as crawfish. Mâche is delicious but can be expensive and hard to find. You can substitute gourmet greens or arugula.

- 12 asparagus spears
- 12 white asparagus spears
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette, divided
- 1 1/2 cups cooked peeled and deveined crawfish tail meat
- 1 cup mâche
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

**1.** Snap tough ends off asparagus. Steam asparagus, covered, 2 minutes or until crisp-tender. Sprinkle with pepper. Toss with 2 tablespoons Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette; chill until ready to serve.

**2.** Combine crawfish, mâche, parsley, and remaining 2 tablespoons Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette, tossing to coat. Arrange 3 green and 3 white asparagus spears on each of 4 plates, top with about 1/2 cup salad mixture. Serve immediately. Yield: 4 servings.

CHOICES 63 (20% fat kcal), FAT 3.3g (sat 0.5g), mono 2.1g, poly 0.5g; PROTEIN 8.3g; CARB 5.3g; FIBER 0.3g; CHOL 57mg; NOSH 2.6mg; SODIUM 431mg; CAL 53mg

*Katherine Cobbs is a freelance food writer and recipe developer based in Birmingham, Alabama.*



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