

Taste!

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DELICIOUS DELICACY NUTRITIOUS TREAT

Forbidden fruit

Figs add a subtle sweetness to a variety of dishes

By Susan Bloom
For NJ Press Media

It's National Fig Week through Nov. 7, and foodies everywhere are celebrating this soft, sweet, rich and flavorful fall fruit for all that it represents — a boon to Thanksgiving tables everywhere and a delicious and nutritious treat to be savored year-round.

For those who only know figs as the filling within the popular Fig Newton cookie, think again — this ancient, understated delicacy adds a special touch to a host of modern-day salads, appetizers, main courses and desserts.

"Figs were probably discovered in Asia Minor and have been around since 2700 BC," Tom Cappello, owner of Gaetano's Italian Restaurant and Market in Red Bank, said of this age-old fruit.

In addition to regularly incorporating figs into dishes since opening his restaurant in 1999, Cappello began offering monthly cooking classes there four years ago, which has allowed him the time and space not only to educate student cooks on the genesis of foods such as figs, but to demonstrate inventive ways to apply them to modern dishes. According to Cappello, figs took root in Syria, Egypt and Greece and subsequently were spread throughout the world by birds as the global trade route expanded.

"In North America, they were first brought into Mexico by explorer Hernando Cortez," Cappello said, "and mission figs were ultimately named after the Franciscan missionaries who brought them from Mexico to San Diego in 1769."

Today, Cappello said that there are more than 700 different varieties of figs and they're more accessible than ever before — from mission to calimyrna,

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Pan-seared salmon with figs and roasted red peppers from Gaetano's Italian Restaurant in Red Bank.



Chocolate-dipped figs with mascarpone cheese. BOB BIELK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

THANKSGIVING FARE ADD LEMON

Use citrus to lighten the meal, not its impact



Sprinkle this citrus-glazed asparagus with toasted sesame seeds before serving.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Michele Kayal :: Associated Press

Sausage in the stuffing, cream in the potatoes, gravy on that big, rich bird. Face it, Thanksgiving is one heavy meal. The best way to lighten things up? Citrus.

"It adds brightness, freshness, it accentuates other flavors," says cookbook writer Michael Ruhlman, author of "Ruhlman's Twenty."

Whether it comes from orange, lemon or lime, the acid in citrus fruits balances fat, the way vinegar balances oil in a dressing. It invites salt and awakens the palate. Citrus zest offers bite with its intensely fragrant oils. Used together — as in the lemon-lime sweet potatoes here — the juice and zest create levels of sweet-sour-bitter that play out across your tongue.

"Citrus fruits have a double life," says Niki Segnit, author of "The Flavor Thesaurus." "The juice is sour, the zest is bitter. You have two different flavors you can play with."

Oranges are the world's most popular citrus fruit, Segnit says, their broad flavor assuring that they play well with most others. Your everyday orange loves apples, fennel and chocolate, but it is so rich in undertones that it also offers surprising combinations, such as our asparagus recipe below.

The sharp, intensely sour juice of limes adds spunk to sugary items, but we often turn to lemons as the workhorse of the kitchen. Their bracing juice highlights almost any flavor, from sweet apple to piney rosemary, and lemon often is what stands between a chef and a one-note dish.



This cranberry sauce recipe uses clementines for a citrus flair.

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