**Adventures in Green Tomato Cookery**

When you hear “green tomatoes,” does the word “fried” come to mind automatically? Aside from that southern classic of breaded green tomato slices fried golden, few people have any idea of what else to do with hard, unripe tomatoes.  Last week at a blustery farmer's market, there were green tomatoes for sale. But nobody – vendors or customers alike -- had the foggiest idea what else to do with them, beyond the obvious.

On that almost-last market of the year, I decided to add green tomatoes to a stew of the most colorful nuggets of produce I could find. Waxy golden potatoes, orange-fleshed squash, fully ripened red Anaheim peppers, and dark green kale. I cooked this farm-grown bounty with wild rice, a deer bone, and locally foraged chanterelles and lobster mushrooms. The fungus gave all of its earthy flavor to the broth. And the slices of green t0mato from the pile on the counter did what a squeeze of lemon could otherwise have done -- cut through the butter, oil and meat juices and sharpen the flavor.

Most soups or stews could probably benefit from some pieces of in-season, non-fried green tomatoes, so don't be afraid to chop and throw some in. They won't bother you, and will probably just melt away, especially if you chop them small enough. And beyond the soup pot, any dish that could stand a squeeze of lemon could probably use a strategically placed green tomato along the way.

A few days later I discovered how to make a green tomato sauce by accident, while cooking cauliflower with bacon. As the bacon browned I added some green tomato slices to see what would happen.  They vanished into a simmering reduction. I added the cauliflower and cooked it in the sauce until it was soft and irresistible.

I will leave you with my recipes for green tomato soup and green tomato sauce. Once you give them a try, hopefully that pile on the counter won't look so daunting.

**Green Tomato Stew**

This soup must be rich and fatty in order for the green tomatoes to do their thing, so don't skimp on the oil and butter. If you don’t have, or want, a meaty bone, use stock in place of water.

Serves 8

12 cups water
1 or 2 soup bones (or replace the water with chicken, beef or veggie stock)
1 cup wild rice
1 pound squash, peeled, seeded and cut into cubes
1 pound of potatoes, cubed
6 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, chopped
1 pound mushrooms; wild, domestic, or a mix
4 tablespoons butter
4 sprigs fresh thyme
3 large green tomatoes, cut into wedges
Several leaves of kale, pulled off the rib and chopped
3 cloves garlic, chopped
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 teaspoons salt (if using stock instead of water, just add salt to taste)
Optional: roasted chile peppers as a garnish

Add the 12 cups of water or stock to a large pot, along with a soup bone if using. Heat on medium. Add the wild rice and simmer for an hour. Add the potatoes and simmer for another 30 minutes, until the rice is soft and turns inside out.

While the rice cooks, preheat the oven to 375. Clean the squash and cut it into cubes. Toss them in two tablespoons olive oil on a baking pan, and roast until soft and starting to brown, about 40 minutes. Turn off the oven but leave them in to cool slowly until needed. At this point they are like candy and hard not to keep eating. Beware. Enjoy.

While the squash cooks, saute the onions and mushrooms in the butter and remaining oil. Add the thyme, and cook on medium heat, stirring as necessary, until the mushrooms are limp and the onions are translucent.

Add the mushrooms and onions to the soup pot, along with soy sauce, kale, garlic, roasted squash chunks and green tomatoes. Simmer ten minutes and adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper.  Garnish with roasted sweet or spicy peppers.

**Green Tomato Sauce**

Full of savory zing, this all-purpose sauce is great on meat and vegetables. You will need a heavy-bottomed pan with a tight-fitting lid.

1 green tomato, cored and sliced
4 tablespoons olive oil (or two slices of chopped bacon)
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cubic inch of ginger, peeled and sliced
1 cup of water
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon soy sauce
salt and pepper
Cauliflower florets or similar vegetable, or pieces of meat

Fry the green tomatoes in the oil on medium heat. After five minutes add the ginger, onions and garlic. Cook another five minutes, stirring often.  Before anything burns, add the cauliflower and the water and put the lid on. Be ready to add a second cup of water if the pan looks too dry.  Steam should build up under the lid and melt those green tomatoes into a sauce, which will coat the cauliflower, meat, or whatever you have cooking in it.