Autumn begins with chestnuts

by Josephine Gregoire with food inspiration by Christophe

Every good restaurateur dreams of using ingredients that are seasonal, fresh and local. Fortunately we can do more than dream, as our region is abundant with a diverse range of quality food and wine products. Nature is about to bestow some real winter comfort food. Bring on the festive chestnut season!

Chestnuts are beckoning you to include them in your winter celebrations and will be ready in time to pick for Easter. Take your holiday visitors to the local chestnut farm, Nuts About Bungendore, and collect bucket loads of them. Proceed to one of our many local wineries and seize a bottle of shiraz, shiraz viognier, pinot noir or Grenache (*Local wineries are conducting a harvest festival in April – see 'What's on' back page)*.

In France, *vin chaud* 'hot wine' usually accompanies a chestnut feast. Pour a bottle of red wine in a saucepan, add a pinch of cinnamon, cloves, fresh orange zest, and a teaspoon of kirsch. Bring to boil, flambé the wine and take the saucepan off the heat. Serve this perfumed and heart warming 'hot wine' in terracotta cups.

Roasting chestnuts

Roasted chestnuts allow the natural flavours to speak for themselves. Using a sharp knife, make a cut in the round side of each chestnut. This prevents them exploding. Roast in a pan over medium heat, shaking them often until you see that the skins have blackened (not charred) and have pulled back away from the chestnut meat. You can also roast your chestnuts in a hot oven, 220°C for about 20 minutes.

Pour the wine, hot or straight from the bottle, place the piping hot chestnuts in the middle of the table and let everyone peel their own, each discovering the pale caramel flesh, soft crumbly and sweet. So delicious! Congratulations – you have become the conductor of an orchestra: peeling noisy, crackling hot chestnuts, accompanied by animated conversation and laughter. Very festive!

Nuts About Bungendore owners Diane and Stewart Deans have a wonderful collection of recipes, demonstrating the savoury or sweet versatility of the chestnut. Diane highly recommends the *Chestnut and Pumpkin Soup!* Bon Apetit!

Chestnut and Pumpkin Soup

Serves 6

- 6–8 cups rich chicken stock
- 750g butternut pumpkin peeled and cubed
- 3 onions, chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 1 tbs flatleaf parsley, ½ tbs mint, ½ tbs sage
- ⅔ cup chestnuts
- Pinch of nutmeg
- Cream
- Chopped chives

In a large saucepan, combine stock, pumpkin, celery, herbs and chestnuts. Bring to boil. Reduce to a brisk simmer and cook over moderate heat until pumpkin and chestnuts are tender. Ladle the soup in small batches into a blender or food processor and process to a smooth texture. Add salt, pepper and nutmeg. Pour a little cream into each bowl and garnish with chives.

Nuts About Bungendore, Bungendore Road, 6238 0778. Open on the weekends or other days by appointment.

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LETS HEAR IT FOR LOCAL FOODS:
the easiest way to reduce your carbon footprint

Conventional farming is under pressure. A large proportion of Australia's food producing areas are still in drought and facing continued water shortages, despite recent rainfalls. Climate change models predict that Australia's dry conditions are likely to worsen over time, with more frequent El Niño events putting further stress on our water supplies. Add to that the increasing price of oil, and we may face a real potential threat to our food security.

Modern agriculture relies heavily on cheap oil to run farm machinery and for the production of artificial fertilisers and pesticides. Many conventional agricultural practices also cause increased carbon dioxide emissions and are therefore a major contributor to climate change.

Organic farming methods tend to be more sustainable up to the farm gate. Unfortunately, the relative environmental benefits evaporate when organic produce is shipped over long distances.

That is because food transport is a major source of oil consumption and CO^2 emissions. In 1999 (the latest estimate available from the Federal Department of Climate Change), agricultural transport accounted for approximately one quarter of total transport emissions in Australia.

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'Locavore': the next big thing

Current figures on Australian 'food miles' are hard to come by, however, the Australian Conservation Foundation website quotes a number of international studies which highlight how typical everyday food items sold in our supermarkets will have travelled thousands of kilometres to reach your plate. No wonder then, that the rising oil price affects the cost of food on several fronts.

If you are keen to reduce the carbon footprint of your food, there is no easier way than becoming a 'locavore'; that is somebody who mainly eats food which has been produced within a distance of a couple of hundred kilometres. It also means eating food that is in season.

All-year round availability comes at a price, as the quality of many food items sold in large supermarket chains is compromised due to harvesting of unripe fruit and vegetables to extend the time they can survive being in transit from producer to consumer. Local seasonal food tends to be fresher, healthier and simply tastes better.

We have forgotten how much joy there is in waiting for the first fresh strawberries from the garden because we are used to having cardboard strawberries all year round in the shop. Or how wonderful it is to eat fresh asparagus while it is in season and then not touch another one until the next season comes around.

Grow your own

Growing your own vegetables can be the most efficient way to reduce the ecological footprint of your food and is the cheapest way of securing your own food supply. The Canberra Environment Centre (located at the corner of Lawson Crescent and Lennox Crossing on the Acton Peninsula, Canberra) runs introductory permaculture courses for those interested in learning more about setting up a water efficient and low impact food garden. Contacts: 6248 0885 www.ecoaction.com.au, sam@ecoaction.com.au

Farmers' markets and local suppliers specialising in local produce are another great way to access the variety of food produced in your local area, and they are a wonderful way to get out and meet people.

There are a couple of dedicated farmers' markets in our region, such as the Capital Region Farmers Market at Exhibition Park in Canberra (held every Saturday from 8–11am) or the Wamboin Produce Market at the Wamboin Community Centre, Bingley Way (held every third Saturday in the month from 9am–12noon).

Other regional markets also include stalls with fresh local produce. Some local farms offer direct sales, such as Landtasia Organic Foods which sells via the internet, or Geoff Foster's Brooks Valley Farm on Bungendore Road (phone 6238 1109 for details). Smaller producers often have signs at the gate.

A renewed focus on local food production is a good way to revitalise our communities, and the locavore movement has been gaining momentum overseas. The word 'locavore' was chosen as the 2007 Word of the Year by the Oxford American Dictionary.

FURRY FRIEND

From p9

They have a nose which is furry to the tip, rather like a cat.

The animals I have in care at the moment are Wallaroos (*M. robustus*). I have two males and a female, Sam, Annabelle and Bully. They come into care so rarely that I have been caring for kangaroos and wallabies now for 11 years and this is the first time I have got to care for a Wallaroo. The three in care came separately and have been brought together to get to know each other before release. We would normally average maybe one in a season.

Wallaroo attitude

They are clever, vocalize a lot and have a whole lot of 'don't mess with me' attitude. These are not, as most people think, a cross between a kangaroo and a wallaby but are a species in their own right. They naturally inhabit rocky cliff or escarpment country and in this area tend to inhabit places like the Tinderrys or the Lake George Escarpment.

Further west they are known as a Euro. They are much shaggier and stockier than an Eastern Grey Kangaroo, have a nose like a dog, and range in colour from silver through to almost black.

The smallest 'kangaroo'

The last type of macropod we find around the Palerang area is the beautiful little Redneck Wallaby (*M. rufogriseus*). The little fellow it was my privilege to look after a few years ago was called Wendell and the frequency we get them into care is much the same as with a Wallaroo.

These guys look a bit like a Swamp Wallaby but they are grey with an orange bridle and rump. Like the Eastern Grey

Wallaroos inhabit our area.

Kangaroo, they tend to melt into the forest during the day, but come out into the clearings in the evening and early morning to socialize.

I quite often find my local Rednecks sharing grazing area with the Eastern Greys. They are no longer common and tend to inhabit back country where they feel safe. So, we rarely get them into care as they do not tend to frequent areas close to roads.

Shot, run-over, chased by dogs, caught on fences

All these animals come into our care because their mothers have been shot, or hit on the road, have been chased by dogs or have become entangled in fences.

If you are interested in learning more about these animals or perhaps in joining Wildcare our 24 hour phone number is 6299 1966.

Naomi and Ken Henry have lived in the Palerang area since 1990 and now live on a rural property between Braidwood and Bungendore that is a wildlife reserve. They have also reserved other property in the district. They joined Wildcare in 1997, and have been doing volunteer native animal rescue work ever since.

Recommended reading:

Linda Cockburn, "*Living the Good Life. How one family changed their world from their own backyard*", 2006

Barbara Kingsolver, "*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle. Our Year of Seasonal Eating*", 2007

Rosemary Morrow, "*Earth User's Guide to Permaculture*", 2nd edition, 2006.

All titles are available at the Queanbeyan Palerang libraries.

The emerging face of agriculture

RECENT NEWS reports from the US assigned the following reasons for steep hikes in the price of mass-produced staples like wheat, eggs, milk and beef: diversion of farm land for bio-fuels; competition for food from emerging middle class consumers in China, India and Eastern Europe; and, rising transport costs as oil prices shoot up.

Interestingly, as conventional fertiliser costs go up, organic fertilisers are drawing parallel on cost, dousing one of the main arguments against organic farming.

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MARCH

20–24 Thursday–Monday
Canberra Folk Festival

Exhibition Park, Mitchell. The five day event will feature local and international performers offering sounds from folk to blues to world music. Sample a variety of food and drink, browse hand-made jewellery and clothing or take a belly dancing lesson. Camping spots are available (additional fee). For ticketing info go to www.folkfestival.asn.au; info@www.folkfestival.asn.au

22 Saturday
Braidwood Market

Ryrie Park, Braidwood 8am start. Goodies include local plants, natural products, crafts and cooking.

22–24 Easter weekend
The Australian Carriage Driving Championships

'Witwood' on the Kings Hwy, Braidwood.
Contact: Dot Willcoxson 4842 7164
Email: jenny.willcoxson@industry.gov.au

23 Sunday
Blues and other live music

4.30–7.30pm every Sunday at the Gundaroo Colonial Inn. Check program: www.gundaroocolonialinn.com.au

29 Saturday
Australian Native Plants Society autumn plant sale

Australian National Botanic Gardens, Clunies Ross St, Acton. Featuring a range of native plant species including some rarer varieties; it is advisable to get there early to avoid missing out.

29 Saturday
Queanbeyan Farmers Market (every Saturday)

Queen Elizabeth Park (by the river near Riverside Plaza) 1.30–4.30pm. Fresh produce, fish, eggs, honey etc.

30 Sunday
Bywong community car boot sale

Bywong Community Hall, Birriwa Rd (off Macs Reef Rd), 9am–1pm. With a variety of pre-loved treasures on offer, the annual fund-raising event for the Bywong Community Asso-ciation will also feature a raffle, entertainment, a sausage sizzle, Landcare plant sale. Free entry for buyers. Gates open for sellers at 7.30am.
Contact: Darryl 6230 3055 or Nora 6230 3305

APRIL

5 Saturday
Captains Flat Country Market

Community Hall, 10am–2pm. Local produce, antiques, trash and treasure. For this and other events check www.captainsflat.org

5–6 Saturday–Sunday
Canberra district wine harvest festival

Local wineries from Palerang and the Canberra region are opening their doors to the public for one big weekend. Take an educational tour, pick grapes or sit back and watch the action while tasting a variety of local wines. For more information go to 'what's on' at www.canberrawines.com.au

19 Saturday
Wamboin Market

Wamboin Community Centre, Bingley Way, 9am–12noon. Locally grown produce including fresh vegetables, eggs, seeds and selected plants.

20 Sunday
Bungendore Market

War Memorial Hall, Molonglo St, 9am–3pm. A variety of stalls with arts and crafts, local produce, and trash and treasure.

26 Saturday
Braidwood Market

Ryrie Park, Braidwood, 8am start. Goodies include local plants, natural products, crafts and cooking.

MAY

4 Sunday
Collector Village Pumpkin Festival

Collector, 10am–4pm. A Pumpkin Ball Friday night is followed by the festival on Sunday with crafts, wine, fine foods and a variety of exhibitions, competitions and events on offer throughout the day. Entry $5, covers parking.

A challenging, 35 kilometre mountain bike race kicks off the Collector Pumpkin Festival on May 4. Pictured here: Mike Beard, Terry Bennett and Tim Gibson, of the Goulburn Mountain Bike Club.

WEEREEWA FESTIVAL

from p7

Saturday 5 April

Shoreline walk from Geary's Gap to Silver Wattle

8.30am

5 km walk with expert commentaries on pastoral history and natural history. Bring water; sturdy footwear and trousers recommended. For more details and map please check www.weereewafestival.org

Lake George Gardens

9.30am–4.30pm

Visit historical gardens of the lake district: Currandooley and Willeroo, and The Old Stone House in Bungendore, in conjunction with Australian Garden History Society. AGHS members $15, non members $25. Contact: Australian Garden History Society, GPO Box 1630, Canberra , ACT 2601. For more details check www.weereewa festival.org

Sunday 6 April

Open Gardens of Bungendore

10am–4pm

Country, cottage, native and vegetable gardens to delight you. Entrance $5 per garden or$10 for all four gardens. Day ticket to be picked up from X Gallery on the day.

For more details and maps please check www.weereewafestival.org

Farmers Market with regional food and wine

10am–2pm
X Gallery gardens, 32 Gibraltar Street, Bungendore, phone 6238 0550
Email: xgallery@msn.com
All producers interested in holding a stall please phone 6238 0119

Harvest Restaurant lunch

12noon–2pm
Royal Hotel, Gibraltar Street, Bungendore
A sumptuous lunch in the back garden featuring local produce and local wine. Bookings: phone 6238 1219

Lynwood concert

3–6pm
Lynwood Café, 1 Murray Street, Collector
Corinna Steel and support bands including Doctor Stovepipe. Bookings: phone 4848 0200, email: info@collectorwines.com.au

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

Barometer

To 30 March 2008
Canberra Glassworks, 11 Wentworth Avenue, Kingston ACT
Wednesday to Sunday 10am–4pm
Phone 6260 7005, www.canberraglassworks.com

Weereewa Print

To 29 March 2008
Megalo Print Studio + Gallery, Canberra Technology Park, 49 Phillip Ave, Watson ACT
Tuesday to Saturday 9.30am–5pm
Phone 6241 4844, www.megalo.org

Lake Gathering

To 30 March 2008
ANCA Gallery, 1 Rosevear Place, Dickson ACT
Wednesday to Friday 12noon–5pm
Phone 6247 8736, www.anca.canberra.net.au

Weereewa Collective

To 19 May 2008
X Gallery, 32 Gibraltar Street, Bungendore
Friday to Sunday 11am–5pm
Phone 6238 0550, xgallery@msn.com

There will also be exhibitions at **Frances Clarice Gallery** (Bungendore) and **Old St Lukes Studio & Gallery** (Bungendore Road, Gundaroo).

www.weereewafestival.org
Phone 6238 0119
email: weereewafestival@ozemail.com.au
PO Box 170 Bungendore 2621

PALERANG COUNCIL

SENIORS' WEEK
6–13 APRIL 2008

Council is sponsoring events during Seniors' Week and all seniors are invited to join in the celebrations. This year celebrates the 50th anniversary of Seniors Week and the theme is "Live Life".

Braidwood and Bungendore Seniors are invited to attend a luncheon at the Bungendore Bowling Club on **Thursday, 10 April 2008**, commencing at 12 noon. Transport will be provided for Braidwood Seniors and musical entertainment is being planned. Please contact Council's offices at 144 Wallace St Braidwood, or 10 Majara St Bungendore, or on phone (02) 6238 8111 by 4 April 2007 for details of the transport arrangements and to register your attendance for catering purposes.

For Captains Flat Seniors, there will be a luncheon at the Outsiders Café on **Tuesday, 8 April 2008** commencing at 12 noon. Please put your name down at the Captains Flat General Store or ring 6236 6161 by 2 April if you would like to attend.

Peter Bascomb
Council Chambers

General Manager
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