

TIAN PROVENÇAL WITH POLENTA

Adapted from marthastewart.com

6 Tbsp olive oil	½ small eggplant, cut in 1/8" rounds
2 c whole milk	1 zucchini, cut in 1/8" rounds
1 ½ c quick-cooking polenta	2 medium tomatoes, cut in 1/8" rounds
salt and pepper	1 c Gruyère, coarsely grated
2 c leek, white and pale-green part, thinly sliced, in half-moons	

1. Preheat oven to 425F. Brush a shallow two-quart baking dish with oil. Bring milk and 2 ½ cups water to a simmer in a medium pot. Whisk in polenta. Cook, whisking, 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to prepared dish, spreading in an even layer.
2. Layer half of leek, eggplant, zucchini, and tomatoes over polenta. Drizzle with 3 Tbsp oil and season with salt and pepper. Scatter with half of cheese. Repeat layering with remaining ingredients, omitting cheese.
3. Bake 30 minutes. Press vegetables down with a spatula and sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake until vegetables are knife-tender and edges are caramelized, about 35 minutes more. Let cool slightly before serving.

GARDEN FRESH SWEETCORN SALSA

Adapted from thecreativebite.com

¼ c cilantro, diced	¾ c onion, yellow or red, diced
3 garlic cloves, diced	2 c fresh tomatoes, chopped
1 jalapeño, diced	kernels from 1 ear of corn
juice of ½ lime	¼ tsp salt

1. Toss all ingredients in a bowl and serve fresh. Store refrigerated up to 3 days.

SPICY PEACH SALSA

Adapted from dailyrecipesblog.com

4 peaches, diced	¼ c fresh cilantro, chopped
½ red onion, finely diced	2 Tbsp fresh lime juice
1-2 jalapeños, seeded, minced	½ tsp sea salt
1 red bell pepper, diced	¼ tsp ground cumin

1. Blanch peaches in boiling water for 30 seconds, then transfer to ice bath. Remove skins and dice into 1/4" cubes.
2. Combine peaches with red onion, jalapeño, and bell pepper in medium bowl.
3. Fold in chopped cilantro, lime juice, salt, and cumin.
4. Chill 30 minutes to allow flavors to meld together.



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Tomatoes: Store tomatoes stem side down on a plate or cutting board at room temperature. Try not to refrigerate tomatoes as cold temperatures deplete their flavor and texture.

Sweetcorn: Eat your corn soon after you receive it. As time elapses after harvest, the sugars turn to starches, and the corn loses sweetness. Refrigerate as soon as possible and keep husks on.

Cucumbers: Put cucumbers in a sealed plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator for up to a week. Keep them far away from tomatoes, apples and citrus, which accelerate their deterioration.

Peppers: Wrap unwashed in a paper towel to absorb any moisture, and keep in the veggie drawer of your refrigerator. In order from mild to spicy, we expect to see red or yellow bell peppers, green bell peppers, jalapenos, serrano peppers, and cayenne peppers.

Potatoes: These potatoes are freshly dug and not yet cured. These should be stored in the refrigerator in a paper or perforated plastic bag. When ready to use, scrub well, peeling is optional.

Leafy greens: Store unwashed in its plastic bag. Or chop, wash, and dry with a salad spinner, and return to plastic bag with a dry paper towel to absorb moisture. Always refrigerate.

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Conservation as the Cornerstone

We speak often about crop rotation and organic principles around plant production in these newsletters, but we don't always go into as much detail about conservation measures we employ to be good stewards of the land. We are blessed with magnificent soil here at Elmwood Stock Farm, and we do everything we can to improve it as we convert solar energy into nutritious foods for you and, by extension, human energy. In [The Gift of Good Land](#), farmer-author-activist Wendell Berry says "We have neglected the truth that a good farmer is a craftsman of the highest order, a kind of artist." With Wendell in mind, we believe that care and conservation of the soil is the art of farming.

In our animal- and crop-rotation plan, each acre of land has its assigned purpose, but that purpose might change from year to year. For seven years, one field might only grow alfalfa hay. Then the eighth year, we plow it down and plant our rows of little vegetable seeds or transplanted seedlings. We use a moldboard plow, which basically undercuts the field about eight inches deep and flips it upside down. Plowing is pretty disruptive, ecologically speaking. For seven years, there were plants, insects, microbes, and aggregate soil particles calling that field home. The plants that were topside are now underground. But the benefit is that those plants begin to decompose, and the nutrients released from their decomposition feed the biota, who immediately start re-colonizing the underground rhizosphere to give a good start to the little plants that we're about to put into the soil. It's something we do judiciously and sparingly.

Good soil conservation dictates that the ground is always worked on the contours of the slope of the field. For the initial tillage, we use a five-bottom 16-inch plow. This leaves the field rough, which helps spring rains infiltrate easily, reducing the risk of erosion as long as the rows are perpendicular to the slope. If one were to plow up and down the slope, the lower area between the humps of each plowshare would act like a gutter and erode a gully every 16 inches, effectively washing away tons of topsoil. Instead, when working on the contours, those same dips between the plowshare humps act like little berms that hold water until the soil has time to absorb it.

Secondary tillage to smooth the surface and prepare a seed bed is also done on the contour for the same reason. This is not as easy as it sounds, given the undulating hills and slopes of the topography of the Bluegrass Region. Working soils when too wet can ruin the structure of the soil for years, and tillage does not work well when too dry. The weather dictates which days are tillage days. Our operation is completely dependent on our few inches of topsoil, so if we get lackadaisical about conserving it, the business erodes away with it. A "good farmer" is steadfast in limiting erosion while prepping the fields in a timely fashion for spring planting.

Planting on the contours is equally important, whether the plants are growing on bare ground or in strips of plastic mulch. In fact, it's even more important when plants are grown on plastic. Since the plastic sheds rainwater, it is important to encourage the water not to collect and run down a slope, so we use the raised-bed berms of plastic to hold the water in place to infiltrate and nourish the plant roots underneath. Bare-ground plantings get cultivated several times a year, which loosens the soil, making it at risk of erosion which is why contour farming is so critical.

So, understanding "the lay of the land" is key to knowing how to manage each field on a farm. Some fields have variable slope patterns, and/or variable soil types, which means we have to plan the layout with careful attention to detail. Sometimes, we will have several row patterns in the same field. Fields that require little consideration to all of this are said to "lay well." We might also leave a portion of the field in sod, where the water naturally drains away, letting the established plants and their roots hold the soil in place. You may have seen these sod waterways in some fields as you drive by and mistakenly thought that the farmer just missed a spot.

Historically, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which used to be called the Soil Conservation Service, has had funds available to incentivize farmers to employ conservation measures on their farms. An example project a farm might undertake is using wind breaks, which save a lot of soil in the Great Plains area where wind is a major cause of erosion. This is a good investment in national food security. In our area, programs were available to offset the cost of controlling erosion, planting beneficial-insect habitats, employing cover-cropping systems, and more. Some of these federal funds were frozen earlier this year, so the future of these initiatives is uncertain. But we remember that these investments in soil conservation date back to the Dust Bowl years. What a wakeup call that was. Stabilize the soil, and you stabilize the food supply.

Here at Elmwood Stock Farm, we have six, going on seven, generations of good farming techniques bred into our heritage. We know that a few inches of topsoil make up our livelihood. First and foremost, we do everything we can to keep it in place. Building the organic matter, increasing the diversity of microbes that develop structure within the soil particles, rotating crops with differing types of root structures, and long rest periods in hay and pasture are other tools we have to maintain and even improve our soil. Wendell Berry personally referred to us as good farmers, and for that we are very proud. We hope that you are proud too, knowing that your food choices help steward and support the abundance of the land beneath our feet. Thank you for taking part.

- Mac Stone