



A chef salutes Italian Project gardeners



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On a recent day off, executive chef Josiah Henry and his daughters met Mary Menniti to visit a couple gardens among those in the Italian Garden Project. It's the second year he and owner Julian Vallozzi of Vallozzi's restaurant, Downtown, have worked with Ms. Menniti, the first of which was the inaugural Fig Fest last year.

"I want the project to get bigger," Mr. Henry said. "And I want to be more personally involved."

On the visits, he surveyed the gardens to assess what will be ready for picking in time for the event.

"Those plums," he said, remarking on the plum trees in Tommasina Floro's garden in Sewickley. "Man, I want this woman to be my grandmother." With grape arbors and fig trees, rows and rows of vegetables, the protected garden is a haven from modern life.

There were many vegetables he hoped to include as a part of the dinner, including Calabrian chili peppers, San Marzano tomatoes and the Monongahela, a yellow and red tomato that looks like a Beefsteak, a plant given to Domenico Carpico of Jefferson Township by a Pittsburgher years ago. And Mr. Henry hopes there will be enough of the mottled cranberry beans — spollichini — because they are so beautiful.

More important than the produce, he said, is the opportunity to celebrate the gardeners, who are planning to attend the day's events.

Of course, Mr. Henry also plans to use cucuzza, even though he hadn't cooked with it before. Antonio Machi of Shaler sent him home with some so he would have enough to try it in a handful of dishes.

One of those dishes might be Mr. Machi's pasta con tenerumi.

In an ideal world, it would be feasible to pick up cucuzza greens at the farmers market. Chances are you won't. So consider substituting them with dandelion greens, spinach or a sweet green. The key is the freshness and quality of the ingredients, since it's such a simple dish.



Pasta Con Tenerumi

4 cups tenerumi, dandelion greens or spinach, trimmed, washed and roughly chopped

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 small yellow onion, peeled and chopped

3 medium cloves garlic, peeled and chopped

3 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped

4 to 6 cups water

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

3/4 pounds spaghetti or spaghetti, broken into pieces

1 large piece Parmigiano-Reggiano

Wilt tenerumi in a pot over medium heat, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

Wipe pot dry and return the pot to medium-low heat.

Heat oil in it, then add onions and cook, stirring often, until fragrant.

Add garlic and continue to cook and stir for about 30 seconds. Add wilted leaves, tomatoes, and 4 to 6 cups water and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Increase heat to medium-high, bring soup to a boil, and add spaghetti. Reduce heat to medium and simmer soup until pasta is tender, about 15 minutes.

Adjust seasonings and serve with Parmigiano-Reggiano for grating at the table.

— *Adapted from Father Sal's Tenerumi in Saveur Magazine, October 2000.*

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