

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

The Aurora Farmers' Market and Artisan Fair opened with a flourish on May 4th and everyone seemed happy to see us again after the long, hard winter.

We were all equally happy to see our friends, neighbours and customers and are looking forward to a fabulous outdoor season. I hope that those who attended our opening were delighted by the butterfly release in the Town Park, where individual families were able to first warm and then release a beautiful painted lady butterfly.

To those of you who were disappointed that they were not monarchs, as I had said they'd be, I apologise. Apparently, the monarchs were not available. The weather was beautiful, the entertainment was good and it was a wonderful first day.

Now that the Market is underway, people will start looking for the early spring produce that they are used to seeing in May. Because the winter was long and hard this year, some early spring crops may be slightly later than last year. For example, at the time of this writing, we do not yet have either asparagus or rhubarb, although the farmers tell me that both should be ready any time now. What we do have are fiddleheads, although they'll be available for a very short time. Once the tightly coiled fronds open into ferns, they are no longer edible.

Like many wild foods, fiddleheads should never be eaten raw. Then they must be washed well and cooked properly to prevent stomach upset. You will need to remove the papery husk, perhaps with a good shake in a sieve.

Health Canada recommends either boiling them for 15 minutes, or steaming them for 10-12 minutes, until tender. People describe the taste variously as similar to spinach, asparagus or broccoli. Some people think that they taste like artichokes. They contain omega-3 fatty acids and twice the antioxidants of blueberries.

Fiddleheads are also a good source of dietary fibre and contain iron, vitamin A and vitamin C. While fiddleheads make a great vegetable dish, they are also a natural combination with eggs for brunch. A recent recipe in the Toronto Star recommends throwing some cooked fiddleheads in with some sautéed shallots and mushrooms to six eggs, scramble together and add some parsley and goat cheese and place under the broiler for 2-3 minutes. It sounds delicious to me.

Now let's meet one of our new vendors, Cathy Williams, who along with her daughter Nikki, has recently opened Catharina's Kitchen in Aurora.

Cathy's father graduated with a degree in horticulture in Holland before emigrating to Canada. He eventually settled on a farm in Oak Ridges, where Cathy and her five siblings were raised. Cathy's mother cooked and baked for the family and food was central to Cathy's growing up. She developed a great love of cooking from her early years on the farm.

They raised beef, chickens, rabbits, and pigs, among other things. Cathy married a local Auroran and has four children, including daughter Nikki, who helps her at the Market. When she was a teenager, Cathy sold her mother's homemade bread at the North York Farmers' Market.

Cathy has had over 35 years in various aspects of food service, including several years serving as the baker at St. Andrew's College in Aurora. There, she developed a love for themed catering and that has led to some interesting catering opportunities, including at the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

Cathy's new café and catering business developed out of a perceived need for good quality, fresh food services for special events and funeral luncheons in the area.

She has earned a reputation for her baking, especially her chocolate chip cookies and her amazing ginger snaps. She makes an assortment of delicious scones as well as fabulous quiches. Many of her recipes are inspired by her Dutch heritage, and an assortment of these can be found at the Aurora Farmers' Market each Saturday.

This year, we're going to celebrate Aurora's Sesquicentennial by featuring old family- favourite recipes handed down through the generations in the vendors' families. The first one is from Cathy and is a Dutch honey cake.

Ingredients:

2 tsp. instant coffee granules

225 ml hot water

4 eggs, separated

155 g. caster sugar

225g.honey

5 TBSP. vegetable oil

375g. flour

½ tsp. salt

2 tsp. baking powder

1 tsp. baking soda

½ tsp. ground cloves

½ tsp. ground allspice

Mix coffee in hot water and allow to cool. In a large bowl, beat yolks with sugar until creamy. Add oil, then honey, beating after each addition. Beat until mixture is smooth and creamy.

Sift the flour. Combine with salt, baking powder, baking soda and spices. Add these dry ingredients alternately with the coffee to the honey mixture, stirring only until blended. Do not over mix.

Whip egg whites until stiff. Fold in three additions into the batter. Pour into 2 well greased and floured 20cm. square pans for 35-40 minutes at 160degrees centigrade or 325 F. Let cool in pans for 10 minutes, turn out onto a plate and enjoy!

See you at the Market!