

Rites Of Spring

...Seafood, Early Season Vegetables Make Perfect Pairing

BY LYNN CARLSON

In the spring, a good cook's fancy turns to fresh vegetables—the sweet, tender, bright-green ones we associate with every new-born growing season.

After a long winter by the soup kettle, we're ready to stir up something lighter and more celebratory to help us throw off the yoke of the season just past.

It's an important rite of spring, but it's hardly a new phenomenon. Thomas Jefferson, a hard-core gourmand and gardener, wrote in his diary about his annual competition with a neighbor to see who could harvest the first tiny May peas, which they shared with great gusto.

There's no better partner for spring vegetables than fresh seafood. Add some carbohydrates in the form of noodles or rice and you have a perfect entree—not too expensive, not too fussy and delightfully good for you.

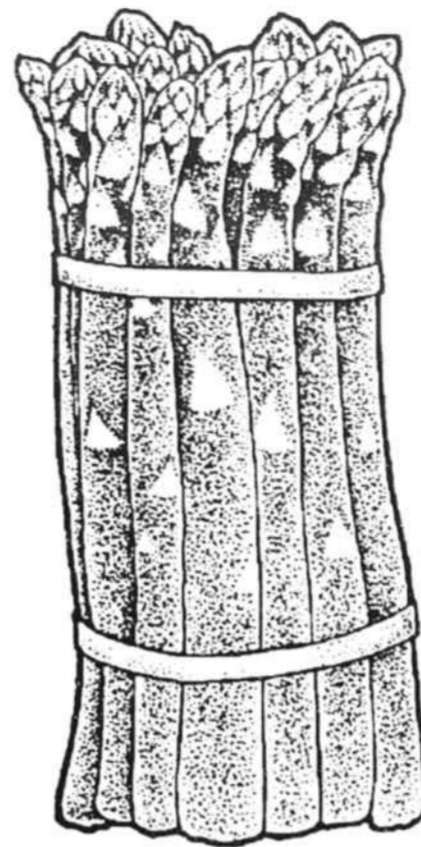
Luckily, we modern foodies don't have to wait by the garden for

the peas to fill out—or by the dock for the fish to bite—before we get cooking. Local seafood markets are open for the season, and supermarkets offer all kinds of fresh produce year-round.

Here are a couple of my own seafood-vegetable creations.

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Penne rigate ("quills with ridges," in Italian) is an unbent scored variety of macaroni that makes a great sauce-catcher. Tender slim asparagus spears are on grocery shelves in the spring, and at a fraction of their off-season cost. The asparagus and shrimp in this pasta dish are wonderfully complementary.

Since we're still a couple of months away from REAL fresh tomatoes, try the dried kind I used in this recipe. (They also are available locally.) At nearly three bucks for a four-ounce bag, dried tomatoes might seem unnecessarily extravagant, but just a few go a long way toward boosting the flavor of



many dishes, including this one.

The sauce comes together very quickly, so don't start cooking it until after you've put the pasta water on to boil.

PENNE WITH SHRIMP AND ASPARAGUS

1 lb. penne rigate
2 Tbsp. olive oil
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced, or to taste
4 sun-dried tomatoes, soaked in boiling water for 15 minutes, squeezed dry and chopped
¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
Juice of 1 small lemon
½ cup dry white wine
1 lb. shrimp, peeled and deveined
¼ cup freshly grated Romano cheese
1 lb. fresh thin asparagus spears, sliced diagonally
Cook pasta in salted water. While the pasta water is heating, saute garlic, tomatoes and pepper flakes in olive oil in skillet. Add

lemon juice and wine; simmer over medium heat until slightly reduced. Add asparagus, stir and cover to steam about 2 minutes; stir in shrimp and leave on heat until they turn pink, about 2 more minutes.

Toss sauce with hot, well-drained pasta and Romano cheese. Serves 4.

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This dish makes a good informal dinner party or family gathering meal. It serves a crowd, so I make it in an enamel turkey-roaster. Spring's wonderful Vidalia onions and English peas bring out the natural sweetness in the seafood. The turmeric gives it a little bit of bite and a festive bright yellow color.

The meat and vegetable amounts and types are quite flexible, so don't be annoyed at my vagueness on the ingredients list.

This dish requires very little accompaniment other than a green salad. Assemble it before the guests arrive, and visit with them while it bakes.

It's my conglomeration of a half-dozen seafood jambalaya and paella recipes, hence the name.

JAMBALAEILLA

Chicken legs and thighs, rinsed and patted dry
Olive oil
2 large Vidalia onions, chopped
2 chopped bell peppers (green, red, yellow or a combination thereof)
3-4 ribs celery sliced
Fresh minced garlic to taste
3 bay leaves
2 tsp. turmeric
1-2 cups fresh shelled raw peas
3 cups raw converted rice
1½ quarts chicken stock or seafood stock (or a combination)
Salt and pepper to taste
Fresh raw seafoods you like: shrimp, scallops, clams or mussels (scrubbed and left in their shells), chunks of firm fish or lob-

ster.

Drizzle olive oil in a large skillet and brown chicken pieces. Place them in a roasting pan sprayed with nonstick cooking spray.

Saute onions, peppers, celery and garlic in the hot oil until just tender. Transfer to roasting pan.

Place raw seafood in with browned chicken and sauteed vegetables. Add bay leaves, turmeric peas, rice and stock. Salt and pepper to taste.* Stir gently. Bake uncovered in preheated 375-degree oven about an hour until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed.

*If you use canned chicken broth or granulated bouillon, don't add salt

Serves 8-12.

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I am fortunate to be married to a primo stock-maker. If you've never made your own chicken or seafood broth, you should. (Better yet, teach your husband how.)

You make stock with mostly scraps—chicken necks and bones, shrimp shells, celery leaves and such. And you'll use it in lots of ways once you get used to having it.

Homemade is cheaper, better and gives you a great way to cut your kitchen waste. Making it in a slow cooker eliminates the need to boil or stir, so the stock comes out nice and clear. Freeze it in different size containers and thaw it in the microwave as you need it. Here are our favorite stock blends.

ERIC'S STOCK

Chicken or turkey necks or bones from raw or cooked chicken (carcasses of smoked or grilled chickens make a nice different stock)

Handful of celery leaves
4 bay leaves
6 peppercorns
1 whole onion, peeled
2-5 garlic cloves, whole and unpeeled
1-2 cups white wine
Water

Place all ingredients in a Crock Pot or other slow cooker and add water to the top. Cover, plug in and let cook on low heat for 24 hours. Strain, cool and then refrigerate overnight. Skim any coagulated fat from surface and freeze in individual containers.

SHRIMP STOCK

Save shells from 1 or 2 pounds of shrimp. Place in 3-quart saucepan and cover with water by an inch or so. Add a bay leaf, a couple of peppercorns and a half cup of white wine. Squeeze in juice of 1 lemon and throw in the rind. Simmer for 30 minutes—no longer, or it will become bitter. Strain through a colander, allow to cool, then freeze in containers.

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