

Handy guide to local produce

Craig Squire picks up ideas from the Australian Tropical Foods website.

In December the Australian Tropical Foods website was re-launched. Since funding dried up for ATF years ago and the demise of CREDC, Nola Craig has continued with the passion of keeping the site alive and now with a small government grant it has been refreshed.

This site is a fantastic tool for anyone who wants to know more about the quality food and beverage farmed and produced in North Queensland. It has a huge list of tropical fruits, a restaurant guide of those establishments that legitimately use local produce, guides to local gourmet products and where to buy them, fruit wine and beverage manufacturers and dairy and cheese makers. Plus it has accurate food trails with google maps and much more, including events and industry news.

Even though I helped establish ATF back in 1999 and the old website was also a well visited and excellent reference, I would forget to check it when planning menus and creating recipes. Now I have it firmly locked in my memory, so I can incorporate even more regional product into my cooking.

One such product that is newly produced in Australia is vanilla beans. There are two companies listed on the site. Vanilla beans or pods offer a sublime if not intoxicating flavour and aroma. In the past they were very expensive imported products usually bought singly or a few in a small vial. Many kitchens could not afford them and were certainly rarely seen in the home. Now we have locally produced vanilla chefs and home cooks can purchase a much fresher product in bulk.

As well as use in recipes the beans can be used to flavour sugar, salts and oils which can be used in dressings and seasonings. I have written two recipes that offer very different uses of fresh vanilla. The availability of fresh vanilla grown so close to home is very exciting. encourage everyone to support these new farmers, even if you can't cook, get a couple just to smell and put in the fridge. Limes are also in season, fresh and juicy, and both recipes incorporate these.

Check out www.australianropicalfoods.com



Craig Squire is the chef and director of Ochre Restaurant and Catering. View his recipes at www.ochrerestaurant.com.au/recipe.html



Prawn salad with vanilla ginger and chilli dressing

SERVES 4
GLUTEN FREE

1kg cooked local prawns
Lettuce – your favourite
1 red onion
2 tomatoes
1/3 continental cucumber or 100gm snow peas
50gm fresh bean shoots
80gm roast unsalted peanuts
20gm coriander

VANILLA OIL (best done day before, store for further use in fridge)

4 vanilla beans
275ml cold pressed Australian peanut oil or light olive oil
Warm oil in pot with vanilla pods – be

careful not to overheat
When cool split beans lengthways and scrape seeds into oil
Store

DRESSING

2 limes – 60ml juice
130 ml vanilla oil (mix up the seeds for extra flavour and garnish)
1 red chilli – sliced
10gm peeled ginger – finely sliced
20ml Tablelands honey
Sea salt to taste
Mix together

TO SERVE

Peel prawns, cut vegetables, wash lettuce and toss in dressing and assemble as shown

Lime and vanilla brulee

SERVES 4

500ml cream
2 vanilla beans
8 egg yolks
80gms sugar
1 lime zest and 2 limes juiced

Scold cream and vanilla – split bean and scrap seeds back into cream
Whisk egg and sugar to dissolve, mix in lime
Add cream gradually
Stir (not whisk) over double boiler and as just starting to thicken
Pour into brulee dishes
Set in fridge overnight

TO SERVE

Sprinkle brulee liberally with castor sugar, caramelise to toffee with flame torch or brulee iron. Enjoy with a tropical fruit dessert wine



Photographs: Mike Watt

\\cnstcpfile02\Groups\ADC\AdMakeUp\EpsOut\468732.pdf