

The *most* *DELICIOUS* MONTH

Celebrate the end of winter with this menu of delicious, seasonal, and portable recipes designed for the perfect **spring picnic.**





by DOROTHY CALIMERIS / photography by ANNABELLE BREakey



TO ME, MARCH'S GREATEST ATTRIBUTE is that it's the month before April.

April is the first full month of spring, bringing with it lovely rolling green hills, the first warm breezes fragrant with fennel, delicate wildflowers in lavenders and pinks, rivers and streams with rushing water. As color begins to dot our outdoor spaces, produce markets become more abundant and colorful as well. I grow excited by the first local asparagus and berries. I start to dream when I see fava beans, artichokes, watercress, wild garlic, sprouting purple broccoli, morels, and stalks of rhubarb. Walking through the farmers market this season inspires me to cook. Recipes come to me fast and furious, and I stretch my culinary muscles like a fiddlehead fern slowly unfurling. I'm ready to cook, pack a picnic, and dine alfresco.

This picnic menu includes ingredients that are quintessentially spring and dishes that are quintessentially California: wild garlic, peppery watercress, and the anise-flavored chervil, complementing the sweetness of salmon; rich buttery fava beans on a slab of grilled bread; the fruitiness of red wine and berries in sangria; and, old-fashioned serving-size pies filled with two of our most familiar spring ingredients—rhubarb and strawberries.

Most of the menu can be made ahead, so there's only last-minute assembly, and all of the dishes are designed to hold well at room temperature. The shrimp, salmon, and sangria need to be packed on ice, and the sangria is best icy cold. If you don't own an ice chest, you can pack individual lunches in small containers or lunch boxes, and tuck a small ice pack in each.

Included are tips on what to look for and how to plan the perfect spring picnic, using the finest seasonal ingredients the area has to offer. So get out there, and enjoy!

For recommendations on five easy scenic hikes near picnic areas, go to diablogmag.com/picnics.

The classic CALIFORNIA PICNIC MENU

GREEN BEAN and POTATO SALAD with MORELS

COLD OVEN-POACHED SALMON with CHERVIL MAYONNAISE

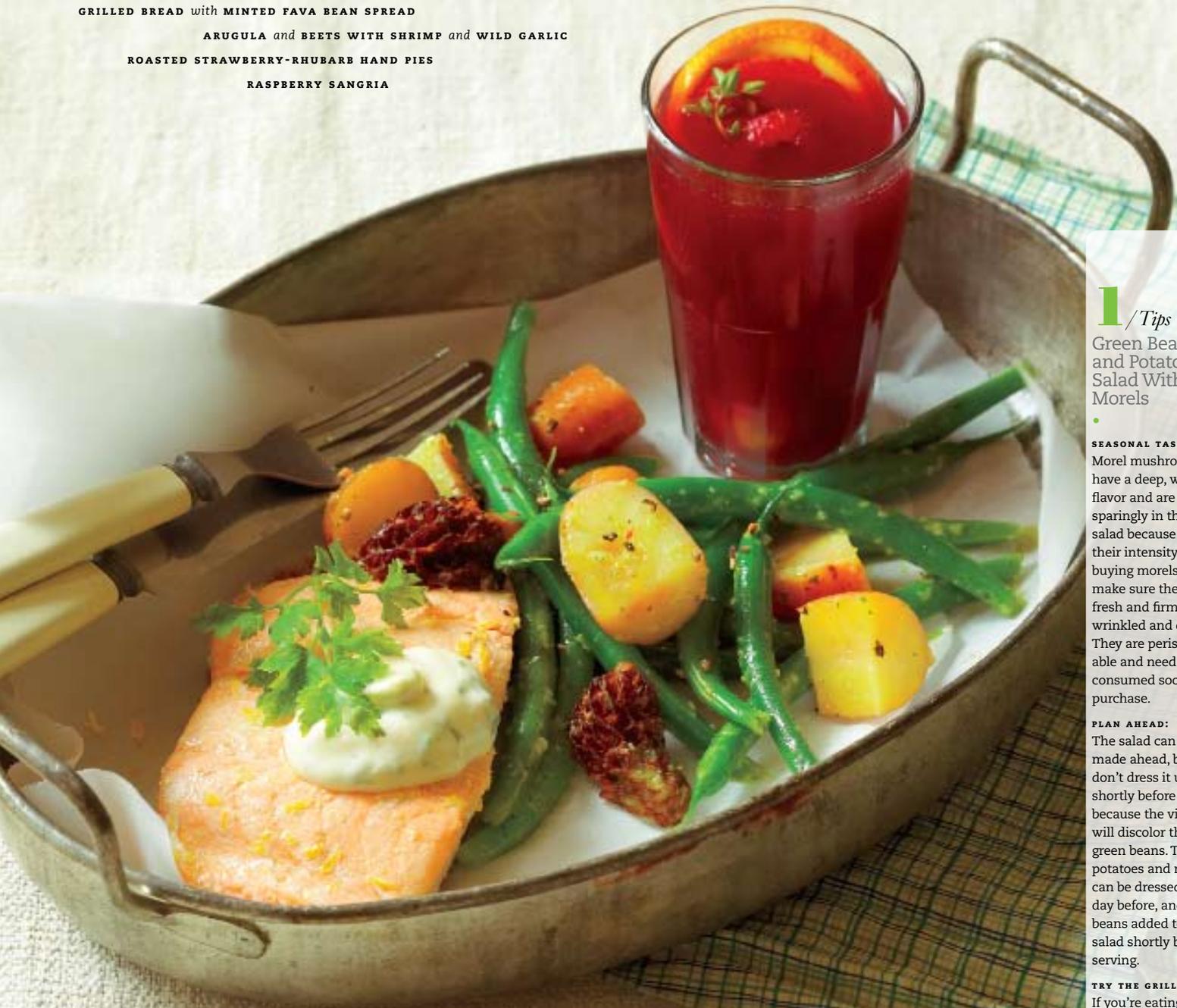
WATERCRESS SALAD with SHAVED RADISHES and CITRUS VINAIGRETTE

GRILLED BREAD with MINTED FAVA BEAN SPREAD

ARUGULA and BEETS WITH SHRIMP and WILD GARLIC

ROASTED STRAWBERRY-RHUBARB HAND PIES

RASPBERRY SANGRIA

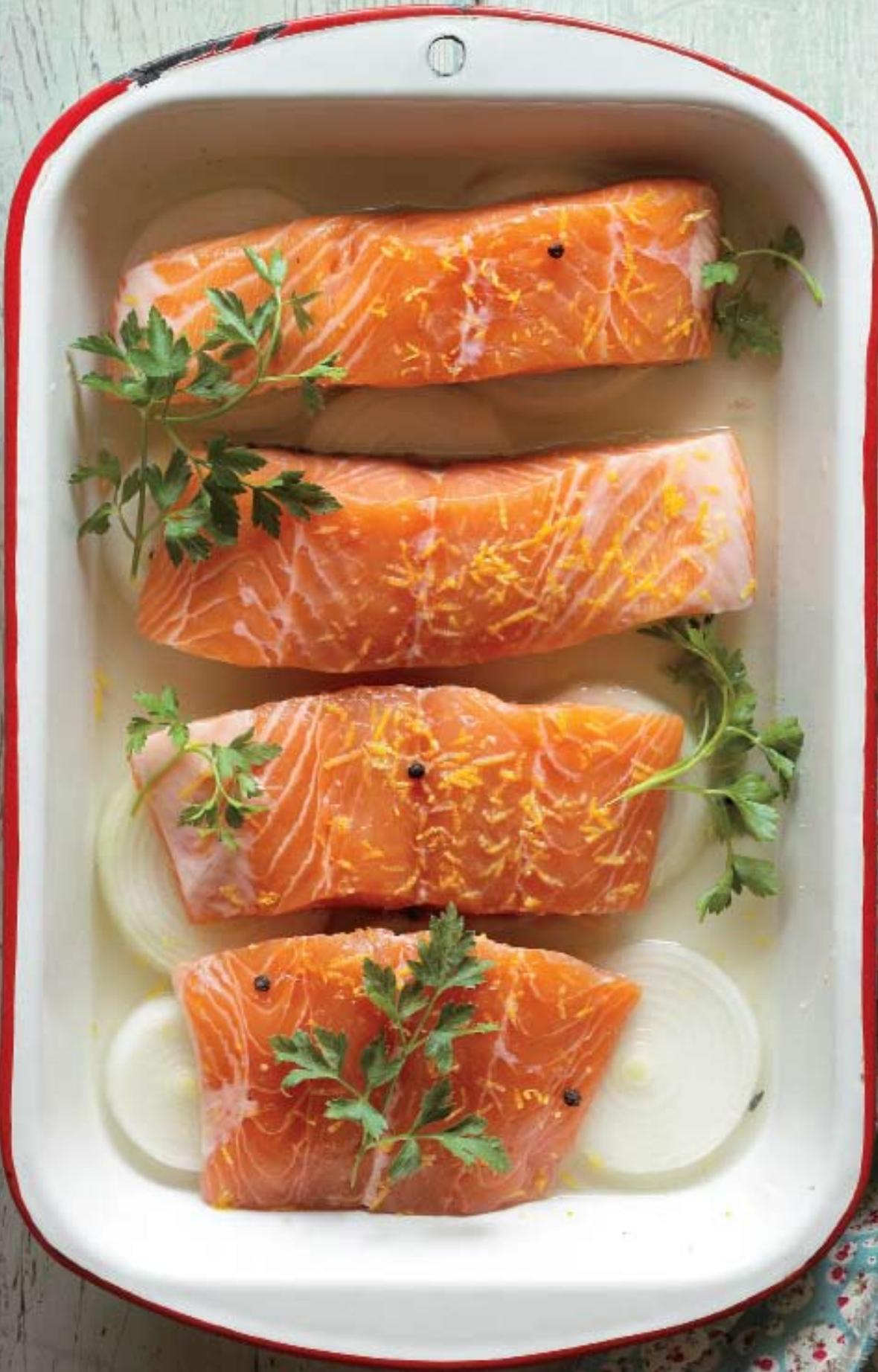


I / Tips Green Bean and Potato Salad With Morels

SEASONAL TASTE: Morel mushrooms have a deep, woody flavor and are used sparingly in this salad because of their intensity. When buying morels, make sure they are fresh and firm, not wrinkled and dried. They are perishable and need to be consumed soon after purchase.

PLAN AHEAD: The salad can be made ahead, but don't dress it until shortly before serving because the vinegar will discolor the green beans. The potatoes and morels can be dressed the day before, and the beans added to the salad shortly before serving.

TRY THE GRILL: If you're eating near a grill, you can sauté the morels in a pan on the grill and top the salad just before serving. Grilling brings out the mushrooms' meatiness.



2/Tips

Cold Oven-Poached Salmon With Chervil Mayonnaise

SEASONAL TASTE: Chervil is a pretty little fernlike herb with a flavor that's a mix of tarragon and anise. It complements seafood very nicely. If chervil is unavailable, you can substitute dill, mint, parsley, or chives.

PLAN AHEAD: The salmon and the chervil mayonnaise can be prepared 24 hours ahead. Seafood is highly perishable, so be sure to pack it on ice before you tuck it into a picnic basket.

KEEP THE SKIN: Cook the salmon with the skin on so that it holds its shape better for transport.

3/Tips

Watercress Salad With Shaved Radishes and Citrus Vinaigrette

SEASONAL TASTE / Spring brings radishes of all types—watermelon, Easter egg, French market—and all hues—pink and green, purple and magenta. Farmers market watercress is peppery and grassy, and when combined with thinly sliced radishes, makes a classic pairing.

PLAN AHEAD / The dressing can be made several days ahead. Watercress can be rinsed and dried the night before.

RADISH PREP / Sliced radishes can be stored in water in the refrigerator until you're ready to eat.

4/Tips

Grilled Bread With Minted Fava Bean Spread

SEASONAL TASTE: Nothing announces spring here like the big, soft green pods housing fava beans.

PLAN AHEAD: Although fava beans are cooked briefly, each one needs to be removed from its tough outer skin. You can prepare the spread up to three days in advance.

OR TRY: You can also purchase frozen fava beans that don't require cooking.



5/Tips Arugula and Beets With Shrimp and Wild Garlic

SEASONAL TASTE
This is a great time for beets—with golden, pink, and Chioggia to choose from. Any kind will do, but the delicate sweetness of golden beets works particularly well in this salad.

PLAN AHEAD
The dressing and beets can be made --several days in advance, and the arugula, shrimp, and garlic can be prepared the day before.

OTHER USES
If the garlic is flowering, pull the flowers off, and mix them with the arugula. You can swap spring onions, green onions, chives, or chive blossoms for garlic.

OR TRY
For a tossed salad, combine all the ingredients in a lock-top plastic bag, seal it, and then shake gently.



6/Tips Roasted Strawberry- Rhubarb Hand Pies

SEASONAL TASTE
Rhubarb has a very short season, typically about two months. It goes great with strawberries—the combo is both sweet and tart, with the rhubarb adding heartiness.

PLAN AHEAD
The pies can be assembled two weeks ahead and frozen, unbaked. It's best to bake them well ahead of packing, since they need to cool completely to travel.

TRY ROASTING
Strawberries are rarely baked in pastry because they give off too much liquid. Roasting them first eliminates the problem.

OR TRY:
For a backyard picnic, I serve these treats hot out of the oven with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Recipes

Green Bean and Potato Salad With Morels

Serves 4–6

Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 pound green beans, trimmed and rinsed
1 pound small new potatoes, scrubbed and cut into quarters
1/4 cup cider vinegar
6–8 morel mushrooms
1 tablespoon butter

TARRAGON DRESSING

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons tarragon vinegar
3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 clove garlic
1 shallot, finely chopped
Leaves from 1 bunch tarragon
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add 1 tablespoon salt and the green beans, and cook until they are dark green, about 3 minutes. Drain the beans, place on a baking sheet in a single layer, and let cool. Fill the pot with water again, and bring to a boil. Add 2 tablespoons salt and the potatoes, and cook until tender, about 10 minutes. While the potatoes are cooking, place the cider vinegar in a large bowl. Drain the potatoes, add to the bowl, and sprinkle liberally with salt. Mix with a spatula, being careful not to mash the potatoes. Let cool.

Cut the morels into halves or quarters, depending on how big they are. Melt the butter in a small sauté pan over high heat. Add the morels, and sauté until tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and add to the bowl with the potatoes.

To make the dressing, combine all the ingredients in a food processor or blender, and process until smooth.

To serve, pour about half of the dressing over the potatoes and morels. Add the green beans and enough dressing to coat the beans evenly.

Cold Oven-Poached Salmon With Chervil Mayonnaise

Serves 6

Olive oil spray
1/2 white onion, thickly sliced
6 salmon fillets, each 4–6 ounces, skin intact
1 cup dry white wine
1 cup water
5 or 6 peppercorns
5 sprigs Italian parsley
1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
Salt and freshly ground pepper

CHERVIL MAYONNAISE

1 cup good-quality mayonnaise
1 shallot, minced
1 tablespoon chopped chervil
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Lightly coat an 8-by-13-inch baking dish with olive oil spray. Place the sliced onion in the dish. Arrange the salmon fillets, skin side down, over the onion slices. Add the wine, water, peppercorns, parsley, and lemon zest, and

season with salt and pepper. Cover the dish with foil, and bake the salmon for 20–30 minutes until done to your liking (I like mine with a touch of darker pink in the middle). Remove the foil, and let the salmon cool to room temperature. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the salmon to a container. Cover and refrigerate.

To make the chervil mayonnaise, combine all ingredients in a small bowl, and mix until smooth. Transfer to a container with a tight-fitting lid.

To serve, arrange the salmon on a platter, and dollop with the chervil mayonnaise.

Watercress Salad With Shaved Radishes and Citrus Vinaigrette

Serves 4–6

3 bunches watercress
1 bunch radishes
Sea salt
Freshly ground pepper

CITRUS VINAIGRETTE

Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
Grated zest of 1 orange
2 tablespoons champagne vinegar or white wine vinegar
4 tablespoons avocado oil or olive oil
1 tablespoon snipped fresh chives

Cut the stems from the watercress. Plunge the watercress into a large bowl of cold water. Then dry completely in a salad spinner. Place the watercress in an airtight container, and refrigerate. Cut the tops off the radishes, and scrub to remove any dirt or roots. Slice the radishes as thinly as possible with a sharp knife or a mandoline. Place the sliced radishes in a container large enough to hold them snugly, and fill with cold water. Cover and refrigerate.

To make the dressing, combine all the ingredients in a container with a tight-fitting lid, and shake until blended.

To serve, combine the watercress, drained radishes, and enough of the dressing to lightly coat the salad (you may have extra dressing). Season to taste with sea salt and freshly ground pepper.

Grilled Bread With Minted Fava Bean Spread

Serves 6

FAVA BEAN SPREAD

2 cups fava beans
1 teaspoon salt
3 cloves garlic
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
Freshly ground pepper
1/4 cup finely chopped mint

6 thick slices rustic Italian bread
1 clove garlic
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

To make the fava bean spread, remove the beans from the pods. Bring a saucepan of water to a boil. Add salt and the beans, and cook for about 5 minutes. Drain the beans, and rinse under cold running water. Gently squeeze each bean (continued on 118)

7/Tips
Raspberry
Sangria

SEASONAL TASTE:

This sangria celebrates the season with a combination of red wine and raspberries brightened by the addition of lemon thyme. Sangrias are versatile and can be made with many seasonal combinations: Experiment with different fruits and herbs.

SERVING SUGGESTION:

If possible, serve in tall glasses with ice garnished with lemon thyme.

OR TRY:

When apricots come in season, I like to substitute the apricots for the raspberries and use white wine instead of red and apricot brandy instead of framboise.



spring picnic

(continued from 51) to ease it from the skin. In a food processor, combine the beans, garlic, olive oil, and lemon zest and juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Process until smooth.

Preheat the broiler. Rub each bread slice on both sides with the garlic clove, and then brush with some of the olive oil. Toast the bread, turning it once, until golden on each side, about 8 minutes total. Place on a rack to cool completely.

To serve, generously cover the toasted bread with the fava bean spread. Sprinkle with the chopped mint. The toasts need to be eaten within about 15 minutes or the bread will become soggy.

Arugula and Beets With Shrimp and Wild Garlic

Serves 4–6

6–8 big handfuls of arugula, rinsed and dried
1 bunch wild garlic—if the bulbs are big, slice the bulbs thin; toss small ones in whole
1 bunch beets
Olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1 bay leaf
1 shallot
6 peppercorns
1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined

DRESSING

1 tablespoon sweet-hot or sesame-garlic mustard
1–2 cloves garlic
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Combine the arugula and wild garlic in an airtight container, and refrigerate. Remove the tops from the beets: You can rinse, dry, and finely chop them, and add to the greens. Or you can save them for another use.

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Place the beets on a sheet of foil. Drizzle with olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Wrap the beets in the foil, and bake until a knife cuts easily into a beet, 20–30 minutes. Let the beets cool, and then cut into quarters.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the bay leaf, whole shallot, and peppercorns. Boil the shrimp until they turn deep pink, about 5 minutes. Drain the shrimp, discarding the bay leaf, peppercorns, and shallot, and refrigerate.

To make the dressing, combine all the ingredients in a blender or food processor, and process until smooth.

To serve, combine the shrimp with three-fourths of the dressing. Arrange the greens on a serving dish, top with the shrimp and beets, and drizzle with the remaining dressing.

Roasted Strawberry-Rhubarb Hand Pies

Serves 6

FILLING

1 pint strawberries, hulled
4 stalks rhubarb, cut into slices about 1/4-inch thick
1/2 cup vanilla sugar or regular granulated sugar
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
Grated zest of 1 lemon

PASTRY

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
4 tablespoons sugar
Pinch of salt
8 ounces unsalted cold butter, cut into small pieces
6 ounces cold cream cheese, cut into small pieces

1-2 tablespoons ice water
1 egg yolk
2 tablespoons milk
Sugar for sprinkling

To make the filling, preheat the oven to 400°F. In a medium bowl, combine the strawberries and rhubarb. Sprinkle with the vanilla sugar, and toss to coat. Spread the mixture in a single layer in a baking dish. Dot the fruit with the butter, and roast for 15-20 minutes. Return the fruit to the bowl, add the lemon zest, and mix to combine. Let cool completely.

To make the pastry, combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor. Evenly distribute the butter over the dry ingredients, and pulse several times to blend. Evenly distribute the cream cheese over the mixture, and pulse several times to combine. Process until the mixture comes together into a ball. Add ice water only if the mixture won't adhere after processing for 30-40 seconds. Put the pastry on a floured board, and with floured hands, knead several times until it is evenly mixed. Flatten into a disk, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

To assemble and bake the pies, preheat the oven to 375°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Cut the chilled pastry in half, and return half to the refrigerator. Roll the pastry on a floured board to 1/4-inch thick. Thicker is better than thinner since the pastries need to be sturdy enough to travel. Using a 6-inch dessert plate as your guide, cut out 3 rounds. Set the dough scraps aside.

In a small bowl, whisk together the egg yolk and milk. Brush the edges of each round with the egg mixture. Place about 1/4 cup of the strawberry-rhubarb filling in the center of each round. Fold the pastry in half over the filling, and crimp the edges with the tines of a fork. It's fine for the pies to look rustic. Arrange the pies on one of the prepared baking sheets. Repeat with the remaining pastry and filling to make 3 more pies. (Leftover scraps of dough can be cut into shapes, brushed with the egg mixture, sprinkled with sugar, and baked alongside the pies as cookies.)

Cut a small slit in the top of each pie for steam to escape during baking. Brush the pies with the egg mixture, and sprinkle with sugar. Bake until the pies are golden brown, 20-25 minutes. If you are taking the pies on a picnic, it's better to overbake them a bit to make the pastry a tad sturdier, about another five minutes. Let the pies cool completely on wire racks. Wrapping them warm will make them soggy.

Raspberry Sangria

Serves 6

1 750-milliliter bottle fruity red wine
1 pint raspberries, plus 1/2 cup for garnish
1/3 cup framboise
1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
1 orange, thinly sliced
6 sprigs lemon thyme (optional)

Place the red wine in a 2-quart pitcher. In a small bowl, combine the 1 pint raspberries and the framboise. Mash the berries with a fork until the mixture resembles a slurry. Add the fruit mixture to the pitcher, pour in the orange juice, and stir to combine. Add the 1/2 cup raspberries, the orange slices, and the lemon thyme, if using. Cover the pitcher, and refrigerate the sangria for several hours or overnight. Before serving, taste the sangria, and adjust seasoning. You may want to add more orange juice or framboise. I like to transport my sangria in wide-mouth quart canning jars. The wide mouth makes it easy to pour, and the glass jars look lovely filled with the ruby liquid. If you'd rather not take glass, any good plastic beverage pitcher with a tight seal will do.