

The Oregonian

Small Bites: Escarole, Heifer International, Biscoff Cookies, maple syrup and more

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Market watch: Escarole

When it comes to autumn greens, bitter is the new sweet. Along with kale, collards and mustards, escarole is another hearty green that thrives in the cool weather, growing through the fall and well into winter. Escarole looks like a head of lettuce, but with broad, ruffled leaves that grow increasingly pale toward the heart. Regardless of size, look for tightly packed heads with leaves free of blemishes.

Like its chicory family brethren (radicchio, Belgian endive, frisée) escarole has a pleasing bitterness. Raw, its crisp and succulent texture adds intrigue and complexity to salads. Cooking turns it tender and more mild. Since the pale, inner leaves are less bitter, try using those for raw preparations and save the outer leaves for cooked dishes.

For some fresh autumn salad ideas, try tossing torn escarole hearts with thinly shaved radishes and fennel or perhaps some blood orange segments with oil-cured olives or sliced avocado for added richness. Apples, blue cheese and walnuts make excellent companions as well.

Escarole takes well to sautéing and braising, whether with garlic and lemon or with red pepper flakes and anchovy, and can be served as a side dish or tossed with pasta along with some sausage or tender strips of roasted chicken. For the ultimate bowl of autumnal comfort, simmer up a hearty white bean and escarole soup -- guaranteed to sweetly chase any bitter weather away.

-- Mona Johnson, [Portland Farmers Market](#)

Holiday shopping list

If you're stumped for the perfect gift, allow us to suggest two choices that truly qualify as food gifts that keep on giving:

Heifer International: This organization helps to break the cycle of poverty and hunger by providing 30 kinds of livestock, tree seeds and agricultural training to families in more than 42 countries, including the U.S. You can pick something as small as a \$10 share of a pig, goat or sheep, or as big as a \$250 water buffalo. These gifts are sustainable and turn into more food or added income for recipients, who are required to pass on some of what they gain to help others in their communities. And encouraging your children to help select the animal is a great way to introduce them to charitable giving. You can browse Heifer's extensive catalog, or donate [online](#).

Adopt an Elephant Campaign: Since 2008, Grandma's Molasses has been a sponsor of the Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tenn., where African and Asian elephants retired from circuses and zoos can live out their lives in peace on 2,700 acres of natural habitat. Grandma's Molasses donates its product to the sanctuary, where it's used to entice the elephants to take their medicines and dietary supplements by masking their flavor with the sweet taste of the molasses. Through Dec. 31, you can help raise funds for the elephants by "adopting" one with a small donation. For \$10 or more you'll get a certificate of adoption, a subscription to the sanctuary's newsletter, a coupon for a free jar of Grandma's Molasses and a recipe for Grandma's Elephant Bread, from baking blogger Heather Baird of Sprinkle Bakes. For \$30, you'll also get photos and information about your adopted elephant, and more. elephantslovegrandmas.com

-- **Katherine Miller**

These little cookies sure do fly

Those enamored of Biscoff Cookies, the crisp little coffee-cinnamon cookies served on airlines, no longer have to smuggle off a fistful in their carry-on bags; the treats are now available in area supermarkets. More curiously, though, Biscoff Spread is also available for those craving cookie sandwiches. Really.

Apparently, those zany Belgians have long put the cookies between slices of buttered bread for their lunches. The Biscoff people have made it easier for everybody involved by grinding the cookies to a smooth, peanut-butter consistency. For those not quite ready for cookie sandwiches, the spread is really, really good on apple slices.

Biscoff Cookies and spread have been spotted at disparate markets at varying prices. Most recently, the cookies were \$2.99 at Fred Meyer and the spread \$5.99. Cookies are also available at Safeway, Rite Aid, Walgreens and Walmart; the spread is also at Walmart, Cost Plus World Markets and Gaston Market.

-- Joan Harvey

Kitchen tip: Real maple syrup

By now, most people understand that most pancake syrups contain no real maple syrup, probably because the latter is much more costly. If you prefer the flavor of the real thing but wondered what the differences were between the different grades, here's a rundown from the website *Cooking for Engineers*:

Grade A Light Amber (or Fancy): Very light in color, with a faint, delicate maple flavor. Many people use this grade for serving on pancakes and for making maple candies.

Grade A Medium Amber: Darker, with an easily discernible maple flavor. Suitable for both pancakes and baking.

Grade A Dark Amber: Very dark, with a strong maple flavor. While you could use it as a table syrup, it's mostly used for cooking and baking.

Grade B: Very dark in color, with an extremely strong maple taste and hints of caramel. Predominantly used in baking.

Maple syrup should be refrigerated, even if the bottle hasn't been opened. You can also freeze maple syrup to extend its life indefinitely. If the syrup is refrigerated in glass containers, then the syrup will maintain quality for a year. Plastic bottles are a little porous, so refrigerator shelf life is usually around three to four months.

Foodie TV Pick: "Man Fire Food"

The Cooking Channel show "Man Fire Food" heads to Portland tonight with the episode "The Backyard Feast." Show host Roger Mooking visits Ned Ludd restaurant, where chef Jason French loves preparing food in his wood-fired oven and outdoor smoker so much that he doesn't have a gas stove. French takes Mooking to Big Table Farm in Gaston, where he smokes chickens and pork belly for a sunset feast in the middle of the farm.

7 p.m. Tuesday, the [Cooking Channel](#).

-- **Kristi Turnquist**

Quote: "Anyone who hates dogs and loves whiskey can't be all bad." -- *W.C. Fields*

http://www.oregonlive.com/foodday/index.ssf/2012/11/small_bites_escarole_heifer_in.html