

Food for Thought

People • Products • Purpose

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“The most innovative techniques of carbon farming or regenerative agriculture won’t save us if we’re not cultivating reverence for the world... Our work is to respond to the call to care for a gift.” — Jonathan McRay, owner of Silver Run Forest Farm

Peace and promise

One of Becky Elder's favorite projects is this serene garden on the west side of Colorado Springs.

Pandemic year renews appreciation for nature

In late 2020, naturalist Michael McCarthy wrote an essay in which he argued the pandemic year was not a lost year, but rather, for many, an experience of nature found, of nature restored. Becky Elder came to a similar conclusion, noting that people stuck at home for extended periods of time looked out their windows with a new appreciation for their gardens and yards and decided they wanted to invest more effort into making those spaces everything they could be. “We were busy as bees,” she says of her fellow landscapers and garden designers in the OrganaGardens Cooperative. “We work hard to protect the environment on client grounds through organic and permaculture techniques, slowing and spreading runoff water, increasing pollinator forage and using native plants as much as possible to benefit our native pollinators.” **MORE INSIDE**

ORGANA GARDENS is a modern version of a worker owned cooperative organized so that all involved are member-owners (not employers or employees) and all share equally in decision making. The group works collaboratively and supportively and shares the proceeds. In sum, the co-op structure provides a framework for livable wages, profit sharing, on-going education and community service. Read more about it at OrganaGardens.com

DID YOU KNOW? Studies show wild pollinators, including wasps, moths and small bees, are more effective at pollinating than domesticated honey bees.

Nurturing nature

Becky Elder creates thriving natural landscapes. To inquire about her gardening and landscape services, call 719-685-0290 or email BluePlanetBecky@gmail.com.



Becky Elder, owner of Blue Planet Earthscapes, often shares a quote by American ethnobotanist Terence McKenna: "Nature is not simply the random flight of atoms through electromagnetic fields; nature is not the empty, de-spiritualized lumpen matter that we inherit from modern physics... it is instead a kind of intelligence." Becky's allegiance to this view shines through in her enthusiasm for forest gardens, rainwater collection systems, native plants, orchards, wildlife habitat and permaculture design principles, which mimic the processes of nature. She's been a valued partner to Ranch Foods Direct on several landscape design projects. Here's more about Becky and why she shops at Ranch Foods Direct.

Update us on the Ranch Foods Direct gardening products you've been using and what you like about them. When we amend soil, we use the biochar product. Biochar is a major help to the soil biota and pushes the "carbon farming" concept forward. I like that RFD was the first to bring it to the gardening and landscaping industry here in Colorado Springs. The best biochar is local biochar, and using recycled wood products is the way to create it. Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate saw the need for that years ago. Biochar, with so much surface area, holds air, water and creates "bio-condos" for the soil microorganisms to live in and prosper! And healthy microorganisms support the whole planet's survival, so we use it at every opportunity.

What are your favorite items at the store? My go-to items are the little pork bangers, which are a favorite of my granddaughter, the premade chile-cheese burgers, and all things chicken. Since I've been to Callicrate Cattle Company in Western Kansas many times, I know and trust the bacon and sausages, as I have seen Mike's happy pigs playing in the Kansas sunshine. Happy pork! We have wrapped up the steaks and other cuts to give as gifts to friends. Sadie, our dog, was raised on RFD raw pet food, eleven years now.

It's nice to know we have a place to go to get our poultry or special cuts for Thanksgiving and other holidays! We appreciate that RFD carries local farmers' products. I find myself at the store weekly, if not more, for produce: potatoes, onions and the vegetables grown right outside the door during the growing season. And for more bangers! The outdoor cooking season is almost here, and it is so important to have a source of ethically raised and processed meats. I can't emphasize that enough.

Enjoy the seasonal demonstration gardens on-site at both RFD stores, as well as gardening displays featuring soil amendments, seeds and plants.



A refresh in a bottle

A year of what the CDC now calls "hygiene theater" has highlighted the value of vinegar as a humble natural cleanser and disinfectant with desirable antimicrobial properties. It also provides health enhancing benefits when consumed. Made by fermenting old wine, cider or beer, vinegar imbues foods and drinks with distinctive sweet and sour notes, along with antioxidants, micronutrients and phenolic compounds. It's a prime ingredient in homemade sauces, marinades and dressings.

According to Sally Fallon, author of *Nourishing Traditions*, almost all bottled salad dressings contain MSG, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, stabilizers, preservatives, refined sweeteners and similar substances. Instead, it's best to make a quick and simple dressing from scratch. For Americans, the popular proportion is three parts oil to one part vinegar; in France, five parts olive oil to one part vinegar is preferred. Try the middle road, using four parts oil to one part vinegar, and then adjust to suit your taste.

One notable health benefit of vinegar is that it blocks the absorption of starch, so it can be used to counter the glycemic action of starchy vegetables like potatoes or corn. Another tip: use it to clean veggies like cauliflower, brussels sprouts, or artichokes (in which bugs can hide) by soaking them for 30 minutes in water combined with 2 tablespoons each of salt and vinegar. Rinse well before cooking.

Big B's, on Colorado's Western Slope, makes a premium raw and unfiltered organic apple cider vinegar sold at Ranch Foods Direct.



Grilled Asparagus

1 pound fresh spring asparagus (the fattest stalks you can find)
4 tablespoons sunflower or olive oil
Freshly ground black pepper
1 lemon, cut in half
Zest of lemon
1 cup mozzarella or feta cheese
2-3 tablespoons toasted nuts such as pine nuts (optional)
2 tablespoons minced fresh basil
Sea salt and black pepper

Wash asparagus well and trim a bit off the bottom. Toss asparagus with oil and season with salt and pepper. Place on a grill that has been preheated to high heat and cook the spears, rolling them to achieve an even char and cook until just barely tender. Spear with a fork after 4 minutes and if it yields easily, remove from the grill. Grill the lemon halves until charred, cut side down. Arrange asparagus on a platter, add cheese if using. Squeeze grilled lemon halves over all, and sprinkle with lemon zest, basil and pine nuts if desired. Season with salt and pepper and it's ready to serve.



RED ONION DRESSING

1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
1/2 cup sugar
1 medium red onion, quartered
2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 cup neutral oil such as sunflower

In a blender, combine the vinegar, sugar, onion, salt, mustard, and black pepper and process until smooth. With the blender on its lowest speed, gradually add the oil in a steady stream until the dressing is thickened. Transfer to a jar or sealable container and store in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

DID YOU KNOW? Asparagus is a rare source of Vitamin B1, also known as thiamin, which helps with glucose metabolism and nerve, muscle and heart function.

NEW IN STORE: The dry rub from Conifer-based RED ASS GOURMET features fresh, organic, non-GMO spices, along with a mild blend of ghost and Habanero pepper, designed to enhance meat flavor while providing pleasurable heat. Their mantra is flavor first, then heat! Check out the full line of carefully crafted seasonings, rubs and barbecue sauces for spicing up wings, ribs, dips, deviled eggs and more.



Spring is the season for local asparagus from the Arkansas Valley! For more local produce options, check out SOCO's weekly online market.



NEW PREPARED MEAT ITEMS come out of the Ranch Foods Direct kitchen everyday! Try the moist and tender beef jerky, below left. Or the new summer sausage, which features a kick of jalapeno! And just in time for grilling season, Chef Monika plans to introduce a new line of hand-crafted sausages, including pork chorizo made from humanely raised Callicrate pigs.



Sweet treats for Mother's Day! Featuring fruit tarts, chocolate covered strawberries and cinnamon apple French toast bake for breakfast in bed



Shop in-store or online at www.RanchFoodsDirect.com

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