

FOOD SCENE

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Tricky Thistles

Prep and cook artichokes like a pro this season with these easy tips.

BY LAUREN BONNEY

The artichoke—that pokey thistle with tender goodness at its heart—may cause trepidation with its thorny exterior, but the rewards of cooking one just right are too delicious to pass up. Here are five tips for tackling the choke.

1. Gloved Action

To avoid that sticky residue that comes with prepping an artichoke, wear latex gloves. Not only will the gloves prevent the sap from sticking to you and contaminating other foods, they also provide a barrier against those spikes.

2. Snip, Snip

When trimming your choke, hold it from the stem. Cut the top portion of the thistle with a serrated knife—doing away with the majority of thorns—and snip the tops of the exterior leaves with kitchen scissors. Be sure to peel away a few bottom layers, especially if the leaves are discolored or bruised.

3. Flame On

Whether it's boiling, poaching, steaming, roasting, or barbecuing, you really can't go wrong when cooking your artichoke. Boiling makes them tender; roasting adds a meaty quality, and barbecuing imbues some smoke.

4. Parsley Power

To prevent your artichoke from turning brown while boiling, steaming, or poaching, throw a handful of Italian parsley into cold water, and let the herb soak before placing the leaves in your boiling pot. Parsley is high in ascorbic acid, which helps prevent discoloration.

5. Dig In

After roughly 35 to 45 minutes of cooking (depending on size), give the inner leaves a slight tug. If they come out with ease, you are good to go. Take the leaves and dive into your favorite dip, or use the hearts to add some toothsome tenderness to a hot dish or salad.



TRENDING NOW

Restaurant Prophets

Local visionaries find success in an evolving marketplace.

BY NICHOLAS BOER



Given slim profit margins and endless work hours, opening a restaurant has always been an iffy proposition. But today, with labor scarce and mandated minimum-wage hikes; sky-high leases and liability insurance; an inexorable rise in meat and fish prices; and increasing competition from meal-delivery services, fast-casual eateries (à la Chipotle), and sit-down national chains promoting “fresh, local, and sustainable” ingredients, the independent restaurant has been thrown into survival mode.

Putting liquor front and center is the most obvious solution. (One of Oakland’s newest restaurants, for instance, is named Copper Spoon Cocktails and Kitchen.) With low or no labor costs and a high profit margin, spirits are fueling the bottom line. But the bar-driven business model is in danger of oversaturation; diners can only consume so many delicious drafts, craft cocktails, and winning wines on a weeknight.

To get a glimpse of the future, *Diablo* looks at three innovative restaurants paving the way for the East Bay dining scene.

SKIP THE TIP SALT CRAFT

With Main Street commercial leases out of sight, Pleasanton resident Matt Greco rented a 1,200-square-foot house on a side street and stripped it bare. A former chef at The Restaurant at Wente Vineyards in Livermore, Greco turned the home’s entire interior—basement included—into prep spaces, a kitchen, and a bakery display area, utilizing every square foot as fully as possible to maximize efficiency and minimize long-term costs.

When Salt Craft opens this month, customers will order at the inside counter or from the outside host before selecting an alfresco table. In developing his concept, Greco says he focused solely on “value perception and taste of food.” A lamb pastrami or a porchetta and provolone sandwich costs \$7 (for a half) or \$13 (for a whole); the house-made pastas and world-class dinner entrées go for \$18 and \$27; and tips aren’t allowed, meaning—in essence—every meal is 15 to 20 percent off.

By buying state-of-the-art equipment, doing all his own butchering, baking his

own bread, offering only local beers and wines on tap, and designing each dish to minimize labor, Greco has created a venture that aims to meet the demands of a cost-conscious, on-the-go, health-minded, and sophisticated clientele. 377 Saint Mary St., Pleasanton, saltcraftpleasanton.com.

COUNTER CULTURE DOSA BY DOSA

At Uptown Oakland’s Hive—a mixed retail, residential, and restaurant hub—Dosa by DOSA’s glass facade lures millennials into a hangar-sized hangout with a photomural of a Delhi marketplace and a diminutive bar that doubles as an ordering counter for quickly concocted, high-quality tikka masala rice bowls, gingery street wraps, and dosas—made-to-order rice crepes—stuffed with butter chicken or coconut-curry lamb (served in a custom box for patrons who are on the run).

Owners Anjan and Emily Mitra have overseen two full-service, dinner-only Dosa restaurants in San Francisco for a decade. But Dosa by DOSA—which opened in December—is another animal entirely. It’s

a seat-yourself, all-day affair (even serving breakfast) as amenable to laptop-slinging singles as it is to a group of friends noshing on whimsical snacks while watching a Warriors game.

By limiting the scope of service, focusing on volume, allowing customers to create their own dining experience (grab a seat at the bar if you want to be waited on), and relying on a commissary kitchen for the basics, the Mitras have found a formidable formula. The quality blows away the standard Indian buffet; the experience is fast but flexible (there’s a lounge area and outdoor seating); and prices are far below what most full-service restaurants charge. 2301 Broadway, Oakland, dosabydosa.com.

STOCKED MARKET CHOW OAKLAND

Over the last two decades, Tony Gulisano has created a mini chain of casual Chow restaurants scattered across San Francisco, Danville, and Lafayette. But with Chow Oakland’s recent debut, he’s realized a dream he mapped out on a sheet and a half of paper in 1994.

The Lafayette outpost, which opened about eight years after the S.F. original, was the first location to move toward that

vision by incorporating a chef-driven market—selling fish, produce, stocks, and sauces—into Chow’s sustainable-food concept. Essentially, it served as a trial run for Gulisano’s master plan. When the Danville Chow opened in 2008, he added a mini bakery. Now, with the launch of Chow Oakland, which is four to five times larger than the Lafayette space, Gulisano has seen his dream come to fruition—just in time to meet the changing challenges of the restaurant industry.

The new market is located upstairs from the restaurant, and visitors will find a small café and coffee shop downstairs. The whole, high-energy experience is wrapped around a production kitchen featuring a wood-fire grill and exhibition bakery.

Gulisano says the ultimate magic of Chow Oakland lies in its multiple venues, which allow for “zero waste.” With chefs in charge of each space, ingredients from one area can be put to use in others. This synergy creates a hotbed for food and drink while solving the problem of rising restaurant costs.

Chow seems to have struck upon a viable blueprint for the new food economy. As Gulisano puts it: “My colleagues will look at our work in Oakland and see a viable path for their passion and careers.” 3770 Piedmont Ave., Oakland, chowfoodbar.com.



Opposite page: Succulent chicken from Salt Craft in Pleasanton. This page, from top: Dosa by DOSA’s idli fries; the restaurant’s cheese-stuffed naan with chile-garlic chutney.

FESTIVE EATS

St. Paddy's Party

Get your green on at a true Irish celebration.

BY SARA HARE



Before you break out the corned beef for Saint Patrick's Day, consider a menu of authentic fare from the Emerald Isle. Despite being associated with March 17, that dish didn't originate from the old country. It was developed by Irish-American immigrants using corned beef from kosher butchers. Green beer, the Black and Tan, and the Irish Car Bomb are also later Irish-American inventions. (Irish coffee? That comes straight from the homeland.)

In contemporary Ireland, the culinary scene is driven by briny seafood (creamy oysters, rich salmon, tender mussels), as well as delectable pastured beef and lamb. Nutty artisanal cheeses, farm-fresh eggs and butter, and of course, the island's famed whiskey and beer round out the staples. But on Saint Patrick's Day, everyone in Ireland celebrates with the traditional dish of ham and cabbage served with parsley sauce.

So, cue up Ed Sheeran's "Galway Girl," and serve an authentic Irish feast where your guests can glean a few tidbits of food history along with their boiled dinner.

Those averse to cooking should head over to Sláinte, the charming Irish pub that opened last spring near Oakland's Jack London Square. Sláinte (pronounced *slahn-cha*)—which means "cheers" and "good health" in Gaelic—offers a lineup of true Irish delights: Guinness on tap, crispy fish and chips with mushy peas and mint, savory shepherd's pie, and satisfying house-made brown soda bread.

After growing up on the blustery north-west coast of Ireland, Sláinte owner Jackie Gallanagh created a place that is reminiscent of her youth—a soul-warming pub that serves hearty food and drink. "Back home, we called it 'pub and grub,'" Gallanagh says in an Irish accent as thick as her stews.

For anyone celebrating Saint Patrick's Day at Sláinte, Gallanagh promises "a grand party" complete with live music, dancers, and authentic food and drink. "We'll be serving the traditional holiday dish: ham and cabbage," she says.

The festive holiday falls on a Saturday this year, and if permits allow, Gallanagh plans to host the East Bay's largest Irish street party at the corner of Second and Broadway. *Sláinte!* slainteoakland.com.



Feast Like an Irishman

Sláinte serves this authentic dish with mashed or whole boiled potatoes, and parsley sauce. Pair with Kilkenny Irish Cream Ale or Magners Irish Cider.

SLÁINTE'S HAM AND CABBAGE

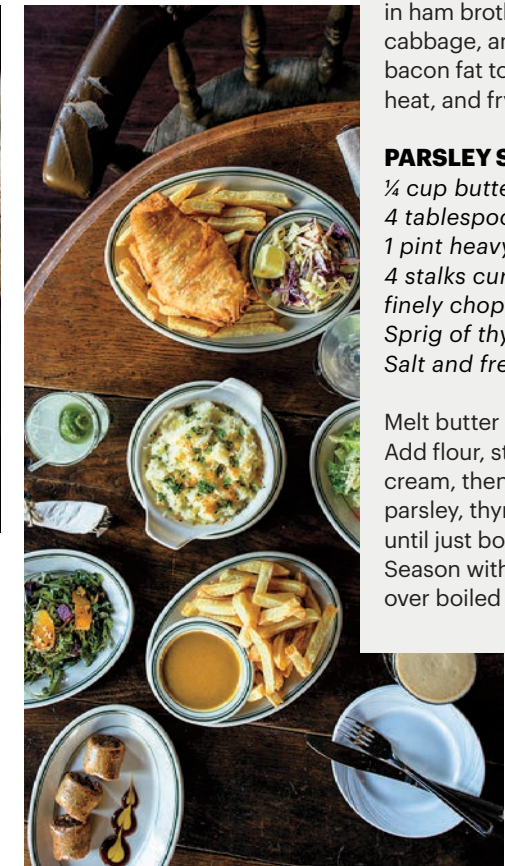
Smoked ham shoulder (2–3 pounds)
Cloves
Black peppercorns
Juniper berries
Green cabbage
Bacon fat

Boil smoked ham shoulder for 30 minutes in water with whole cloves, black peppercorns, and juniper berries. Remove ham from pot. Quarter the cabbage, and boil in ham broth for about 5 minutes. Remove cabbage, and let dry. Roughly chop. Add bacon fat to frying pan on medium-high heat, and fry cabbage.

PARSLEY SAUCE

¼ cup butter
4 tablespoons flour
1 pint heavy whipping cream
4 stalks curly parsley, stems removed and finely chopped
Sprig of thyme (remove before serving)
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Melt butter in a saucepan over low heat. Add flour, stirring for 2–3 minutes. Add cream, then simmer for 4–5 minutes. Add parsley, thyme, salt, and pepper. Simmer until just boiling for 4–5 minutes more. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve over boiled or mashed potatoes.



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