



# High Ground Organics Community Supported Agriculture

July 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011

## Eat Your Fennel, by Steve (and Jeanne)

I can remember back to a time that I just didn't get the appeal of fennel. This course, stringy, strongly scented vegetable didn't seem worth the trouble to cook. But now I can honestly say that it is among my very favorite vegetables. I fully realize that there are many of our CSA members who still don't "get" fennel, and if you are among these, you simply must try Jeanne's recipe below for roast fennel and onions. The key is to cook it long enough and to use enough olive oil so the fennel doesn't dry out. When the fennel and onions become soft on the inside, and caramelized on the outside, the combination is sublime. This was one of my step-father's favorite dishes when he came to visit us on the farm, and is one of mine as well.

Why learn to like fennel? Aside from the fact that your CSA farm grows fennel, and you are therefore confronted with it several times a year, it is a vegetable that offers good nutritional benefits. According to the FDA, it is an excellent source of vitamin C, and a very good source of dietary fiber, potassium, manganese, folate, and molybdenum. The website the World's Healthiest Foods says that fennel contains unique phytonutrients that make it a strong antioxidant. One phytonutrient particular to fennel, called anethole, has been shown in animal studies to reduce inflammation, help prevent cancer, and protect the liver from toxic chemical injury. In addition, fennel's high vitamin C content offers antioxidant protection and immune support. Its high fiber can help reduce cholesterol and improve colon health, and the good potassium levels can help lower high blood pressure.

Here are some other ideas for using your fennel. While you're cooking up the bulbs, you can chop the leaves and add them to your salad, and give the stems to kids to chew on if they are clamoring for snacks right before dinner. (I actually chew on them myself if I find myself getting too hungry when I'm working on dinner.) Even better, read the chef's ideas below. Andrew Cohen uses minced fennel in a "soffritto" with onions, carrots, and celery, to freeze and have on hand for a quick start to any meal. If you are a meat eater, he also pairs fennel with lamb, in a recipe that looks absolutely delicious (see the website for the recipe).

We grow lovely fennel, which as a Mediterranean vegetable seems to really like our cool coastal climate. So, please enjoy your fennel--it's a taste worth cultivating.

*Everything in your box and the flowers are certified organic. All veggies and fruits were grown by High Ground Organics. Organic flowers are from the Thomas Farm.*

## CSA Cooking Demo – Williams Sonoma, Los Gatos

Saturday, August 13th, from 10 am to 12 , \$10

Join Joni Sare, Therapeutic Chef, at Williams-Sonoma, in Los Gatos, for an improv cooking demo using the ingredients from the CSA box, plus your pantry and spice drawer. Joni will share info on: the anatomy of food, nutritional information, biochemistry of the body, the alchemy of cooking, tips and tricks for healthy cooking, and so much more. (These classes are really fun!) Sign up at [www.jonisare.com/cooking-outside-the-box/](http://www.jonisare.com/cooking-outside-the-box/) or just show up.

## Veggie Notes

Store everything except potatoes in the refrigerator. If the celery or fennel are too large for your crisper, you can lop off the tops and make a soup stock with them. Radish greens are completely edible but they are really only good for one or two days. Cut the greens from the radishes right away and cook the greens as soon as possible for maximum freshness.

## This Week

Fennel

Radishes

Strawberries

Green Cabbage

Potatoes

Lettuce

Celery

Mystery

**Flowers: Mixed Bouquet**

## Roasted Fennel with Onions

1 bunch fennel	1 large onion
olive oil	salt and pepper

Chop the fennel stems from the bulbs (you can give these to children, or yourself, to chew on for the licoricy flavor while they're clamoring for dinner), and slice the bulbs through the base into wedges that stay more or less intact (about 6 to 8 depending on the size of the bulb). Coat a roasting pan with a layer of olive oil. Chop onion into slices or small wedges. Place fennel and onions in the roasting pan and slather with a generous amount of olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cover and roast at 400 for 30 minutes, then uncover and roast another 15 minutes or longer, until onions and fennel are caramelized (slightly browned).

## Notes from Chef Andrew Cohen

I love celery for the many roles it plays in the kitchen. It always seems to find its way into dishes in supporting roles, but it actually makes a nice dish on its own. Absolutely elemental in simplicity, the sauté below is surprising for all the flavor it has with just celery, butter, salt and pepper as an ingredients list. Celery can also help boost flavor in dishes where sodium content is an issue. Celery would be great with a potato salad done with a vinaigrette, providing crunch and a little tang against the soft sweetness of the potato. Add into a quick sauté of shredded cabbage and fennel with white wine to accompany grilled chicken dusted with fennel seed and fresh marjoram. Finely slice the fennel and celery and toss with lettuce for a quick salad with crunch. Save some of the fennel and add it to the water when making mashed potatoes for an

intriguing variation, and use olive oil rather than butter. That Provençal state of mind has me thinking of making another of my vegetable jams with summer squash (mystery item). This one uses onions, celery, tomato, and basil, and was inspired by a sort of ratatouille I did without eggplant once. If there is time, my daughter and I will play in the kitchen and make some shortcake to go with strawberries.

I have included a recipe that is not for a dish, but for what I consider to be an important “basic element” for cooking, and that is “soffritto”. This is an amalgamation of onion, celery, carrot and/or fennel, that is cooked to a golden color, or darker, that is used as a base for so many things. I always enjoy making this dish as it is like alchemy watching the raw ingredients turn to gold and becoming so aromatic. Also, having this on hand will save you lots of time later in the kitchen, and can elevate the flavor of a dish immensely.

**Soffritto**, from Chef Andrew Cohen

4 cups minced onion	2-3 cups minced celery
2-3 cups minced carrot and/or fennel bulb	2-3 cups olive oil

*Discussion:* Think of how often a dish starts with a sauté of onions, carrots, and celery. In Italy this combination is called soffritto. (In France it is cooked with butter and called mirepoix, but for general purposes I like it cooked with a light flavored olive oil or even grapeseed oil, which is neutrally flavored, so I call it by the Italian name.) I like to make this in larger batches, removing some when it is still pale, or blond, then cooking the remaining amount until it is a darker shade of amber, giving it a caramelized flavor. I sometimes even let some go until it is quite dark, like tobacco, for a very deep flavor. I then freeze it in batches. I use large zip bags and flatten out the soffritto in the bags, making it easier to stack and easier to simply break off the amount I wish to use. Some people freeze it in ice trays as you might pesto. However you store it, having this in the freezer is like having a time machine. It can make having good tasting food on the table much quicker, or if you have several pans going at once it is quite helpful as well as it is easy to burn smaller amounts of onions.

I make some soffritto using carrots, and some using fennel bulb. Sometimes I use neither. Carrots and fennel are both sweet, but the carrots cook down sweeter and color the soffritto, while the fennel will of course give a noticeable fennel aroma and taste to the dish. I tend to use a lot more fennel in summer, and I like it for a base. Sometimes I use both. Remember, soffritto is a base, so depending on what you are cooking, you might add things like garlic, herbs, wine, finely diced tomato, mushrooms, peppers, etc. You can use it with the garlic and herbs and extra oil as a base for greens, or you can add stock and mushrooms and use it to braise meat or vegetables. Add a dollop to cooked beans or grains to add depth of flavor on the fly, or use it as the base to a gratin of summer vegetables. There are many uses for this time saver.

Although it seems like a lot of oil, if you use too little you run the risk of scorching the vegetables and you have to spend more time monitoring the pan. Plus, you can strain the oil off before freezing the soffritto and reuse it for cooking with. The flavors of the soffritto will translate to the dish you are cooking as an additional layer of flavor.

*Method:* You can use a food processor to mince all the vegetables but the onion. (Onions will simply liquefy in a processor or blender.) Chop the onions by hand using a very sharp knife. For the rest, process them quite small, but be sure to stop before they start to liquefy. You can use a blender if you wish, but do it in batches or you may wind up with puree at the bottom of the blender. You can use a knife for these also, of course.

Heat a large pan (preferably a sauteuse with high sides) over medium heat. When warm, add the oil. When the oil starts to warm, add the vegetables and stir to coat all the vegetables with oil. Cook gently, stirring every so often to prevent sticking, until the vegetables turn a golden straw color. This can take up to 45 minutes. When they are golden blond, the soffritto is ready. You can refrigerate or freeze it until needed.

If you wish to make a darker soffritto, remove the amount you wish to keep lighter and continue cooking until the soffritto is an amber color, or as dark as you wish. Remember, if you have a small amount in a larger pan you must be vigilant to prevent burning, so turn down the heat and keep an eye out, or transfer to a smaller pan and keep the heat low.

Keeps a week in the refrigerator or around 6 months in the freezer. When storing in the freezer, I strain off the oil so the soffritto freezes better, and I get the flavored oil to cook with. You can make soffritto with less oil, but you need to be vigilant to prevent scorching. If you are cooking with less oil and the vegetables feel like they are sticking, add a shot or two of water to the pan to loosen things up. Be sure to stir often.

**Sautéed Celery**, from Chef Andrew Cohen

*Discussion:* Most of the time celery is thought of in a supporting role, or as diet food, if it is thought of at all. Integral to so many dishes as part of a base, most would never think of celery as a dish on its own, but here it is. This dish has succulence, a bit of crunch, and a clean flavor. This recipe is based on something I read in a magazine, *Saveur* I think it was, long ago. I thought it was a crazy idea but decided to give a go for just that reason, and was pleasantly surprised. I think you will be, too. High quality butter for this is important as it is all there is to flavor the dish besides the celery. The butter thickens to form a light sauce coating the celery batons.

1 head celery	6-8 TBS butter
salt and pepper to taste	

*Method:* Separate the large stalks from the celery head, saving the heart for something else. Trim the leaves and reserve, and wash the celery well, then drain. Trim the ends off the stalks, then cut away any “joints” on the stalks near the tops. I find these to be bitter and tough. Cut each stalk into 2½ x ½ inch batons.

Heat a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. (The pan should be just large enough to hold the celery without too much piling up on each other.) When the pan is hot, add 6 tablespoons of butter. When the butter foams, add the celery batons and toss to coat. If it seems more butter is needed to get a good coating of butter on all the batons, add the last 2 tablespoons of butter. Reduce the heat to medium and gently sauté the celery, tossing and turning it occasionally in the butter, until it is just tender. The tip of a knife should just slip in without much resistance. Add the reserved celery leaves and season with salt and pepper. Cook just to warm the leaves, and serve.