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## The Winter Garden | Warming Recipes From Four Season Farm

Maine winters may be icy, but the couple behind Four Season Farm won't let the chill stop them. The hearty, warming recipes here—some from the farm, others from grateful local chefs—take full advantage of their extraordinary vegetables.

BY NANCY HARMON JENKINS

On the coast of Maine, where winter temperatures can go well below freezing and stay there for days—weeks—at a time, winter gardening mostly involves spreading seed catalogs out on the kitchen table and dreaming of May and June. But not for Barbara Damrosch and Eliot Coleman, who live down past Blue Hill, a town on the east side of Penobscot Bay, on one of those long, rocky peninsulas for which Maine is renowned. I dropped in on the couple—partners in life as well as in the enterprise they call Four Season Farm—just before lunch one gray day last February, when storm clouds lowered and a chill wind whipped the ocean waves to a froth. I found them out in one of their unheated plastic-covered greenhouses, in shirtsleeves and sweating slightly as they harvested a surfeit of organically grown salad greens along with baby beets, little white Hakurei turnips and candy-sweet Napoli carrots.

Over the past several years, Damrosch and Coleman have built a thriving business as producers and purveyors of extraordinary winter vegetables, which they raise without major inputs of heat, extra light or growth-promoting chemicals. In the process they have become acclaimed—through their books, lectures and television appearances—as partisans of sustainably produced high-quality food. The key to their approach can be expressed in three words: Organic. Local. Authentic.

"We Americans have grown to depend on winter crops from California and Florida," Coleman told me over a bowl of Damrosch's hot, creamy butternut squash soup. "We've built highways and transport systems to get them to market; we even subsidize the water for irrigation. And it's our taxes that are paying."

Alarmed at the explosion of industrially produced food that is being labeled organic, Coleman says, "If you know the first name of your farmer, then the food you buy can be labeled organic—and authentic." But what's so wrong with mass-producing organically raised fruits and vegetables? In their view, organic is only the first step. To make a vegetable authentic takes way more than leaving out chemical pesticides and fertilizers. If the two of them can grow prize vegetables in the bitter winters of Down East Maine,



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### RECIPES IN THIS ARTICLE

Salmon with Arugula Cream and Soy-Braised Beets

Pan-Roasted Chicken and Leeks

Crispy Celery Root Cutlets

Baked Endives with Bacon and Mascarpone

Fennel and Leek Ragout with Pecorino

Spinach-Watercress Salad with Candied Walnuts

Scallops with Saffron Cream and Turnip Greens

Butternut Squash and Leek Soup

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their theory goes, growers anywhere can do the same. "We can learn a lot from Europeans," Damrosch said. "Look at the map." She drew an imaginary map on the tabletop. "Maine is on the same latitude as Saint-Tropez."

Coleman continued the thought: "So they get exactly the same amount of winter daylight, and daylight is as important as temperature." Eight years ago the couple made a winter trip to Europe. They found that in southern France and northern Italy, locally raised crops are exactly what people expect to find in their market any time of year.

The first trick is to select winter-hardy vegetables. The second is to protect the plants from severe freezes. So Damrosch and Coleman have built four enormous tunnel-like plastic greenhouses that arch like cathedrals above thick rows of Bianca Riccia endive, butternut squash, Swiss chard, leeks, celery root, Bull's Blood beets (grown for their tender greens) and buttery lettuces.

It all looks very beautiful. It also looks costly. But, as Coleman explains, a growing tunnel is economical. "It's basically an erector set," he says. "A 3,000-square-foot greenhouse costs just \$6,000 to put up." The couple hopes to eventually gross \$100,000 a year, and since they've expanded into summer vegetables, Damrosch says, they're very close to achieving that goal.

But for now, the most important part of the operation is still the winter supply of vegetables to local markets and to local chefs, like Eric Czerwinski and Garry Botbyl (who, along with Damrosch and John Hikade of Blue Hill's Arborvine restaurant, provide the recipes that follow). Czerwinski's Café Out Back is literally that—it's out in back of his parents' South Brooksville general store, where he started cooking a few years ago with a casual but imaginative style that quickly brought him a reputation as one of the peninsula's best young chefs. Czerwinski transforms Four Season's tiny golden and deep red beets into an amazing accompaniment for locally raised salmon.

At the Brooklin Inn in Brooklin, Garry Botbyl has also done wonders. While Damrosch unloaded crates of deep-green watercress, slender leeks and alabaster fennel bulbs from the dark blue station wagon she makes deliveries in, I chatted with the restaurant's owner, Chip Angell, about how they use Four Season's remarkable produce. A salad of greens, fruit and local cheese and nuts is a favorite, he told me. Leeks and fennel become a savory ragout to accompany fish or a leg of local lamb. "But really," he said, "so much of what Barbara brings me doesn't need anything at all done to it."

Deliveries accomplished, we headed back to the farm and joined Coleman in one of the growing tunnels. He pulled a scarlet radish from the chocolate earth, dusted the soil off on his overalls and handed it to me. "Try this," he said, as if challenging my taste buds. It was just a radish, but it was also astonishing—crisp, sweet, sharp, pungent, assertive and seductive, all at the same time. "More!" I cried, and Coleman looked pleased with himself.

"That's what they all say." He smiled as he handed me another.

*Nancy Harmon Jenkins divides her time between Maine and Italy. She is the author of several books about Mediterranean food. Her next, to be published this spring, is The Essential Mediterranean.*

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