

# freshly DRESSED

## Spring salads

from the  
Berkshires'  
Verdura  
Restaurant.

AS THE BERKSHIRES COME ALIVE with the promise of spring, the season's freshest ingredients make their debut in the region's top restaurants. At Verdura Cucina Rustica, a Tuscan-style restaurant in Great Barrington, chef Bill Webber welcomes the season with a medley of springtime herbs, vegetables, and fruits in the restaurant's beautiful salads.

A Berkshire native and Culinary Institute of America graduate, Webber, 34, draws inspiration from a variety of sources, including time spent working at New York restaurants such as Zöe and Bouley and a stint as a sous chef at Wheatleigh in Lenox, Massachusetts.

Verdura's menu and philosophy owe a lot to an extended trip to Italy on which Webber ate his way through Tuscany, Umbria, the coastal towns of the Cinque Terra region, and Rome. "My favorite restaurants there feature wood grilling, and you had the feeling that anything you ate indoors could also be eaten at an alfresco picnic," says Webber. "That's the kind of place I wanted to open."

Since opening in the summer of 2000, Verdura has attracted a following among both locals and seasonal residents with its rustic-elegant surroundings (mahogany tables, wooden beams, an open kitchen) setting the stage for pastas, fish, meats, and crisp wood-fired pizzas.

And then there are salads. Webber's artful creations feature the best early produce: snappy baby asparagus, deep-purple beets, silky fava beans. A proponent of locally grown, organic seasonal produce—Verdura is a member of the Berkshire Grown

initiative to support area farms—Webber also welcomes another product of spring: foragers who come to Verdura's doorstep selling ramps (wild leeks) and morel mushrooms. The following salads make use of many of these ingredients. Try them at home, and enjoy the coming season.

### Mediterranean Couscous Salad

**Time: 1 hour; active time: 20 minutes**  
"Middle Eastern" or "Israeli" large-grain couscous is about the size of tapioca pearls and is available at many grocery stores and natural-foods stores.

- 2 cups water
- 1 cup Middle Eastern (large) couscous
- 1 pinch saffron
- 1/2 teaspoon plus 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon plus 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 6 large mint leaves, sliced thin
- 2 medium shallots, sliced thin
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 1 teaspoon chili flakes
- 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
- 1/2 cup golden raisins
- 20 precooked medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 cups baby arugula
- Garnish: peeled shrimp with tails intact, fresh mint sprigs, and strips of lemon zest

In a covered saucepan over medium-high heat, bring water, couscous, saffron, 1/2

*Punters Corner Shiraz*  
(Coonawarra, Australia): \$27

The mint, ginger, and garlic in this recipe call for a fruity but full-bodied red with a touch of spiciness. The Gigondas is full of racy berry fruit, and the Shiraz is big and bold, with a touch of mint on the finish.

#### For the dessert course:

*Ceretto Moscato d'Asti*  
(Piedmont, Italy): \$19

Italy's famous slightly sparkling, light, delicious dessert wine is the perfect match for this recipe. It is low in alcohol and not too sweet, with honey and peach flavors that will pair nicely with the citrus zest and vanilla.

Market Wines, 207-828-0900. 24 Preble St., Portland, ME. [www.marketwines.com](http://www.marketwines.com)

### Lemon-Orange Cloud Cake

**Total time: 1 1/4 hours; active time: 40 minutes**

- 1 1/4 cups egg whites (about 9 jumbo eggs), at room temperature
- 1 1/4 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 cup cake flour
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon grated orange zest
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest

#### LEMON-ORANGE BUTTER CREAM FROSTING:

- 1 1/4 cups butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon grated orange zest
- 3 cups sifted powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 2 to 3 tablespoons fresh orange juice
- Garnish: fresh tulip petals

*To make the cake:* Preheat oven to 375°. Pour egg whites into a large bowl and add cream of tartar, vanilla, and salt. Beat with an electric mixer at high speed until soft peaks form. (Egg whites are sufficiently beaten if they stay put when you shake the bowl.) Sprinkle in sugar, 2 tablespoons at a time, continuing to beat at high speed until sugar dissolves and egg whites stand in

by ADEENA SUSSMAN ■ photography HOWARD L. PUCKETT

teaspoon salt, 1/4 teaspoon pepper, and butter to a simmer. Turn heat down to medium-low; cook approximately 20 minutes. Remove from heat; let stand, covered, 10 minutes or until couscous is tender and separates easily. Chill in refrigerator.

In a medium bowl, add remaining ingredients, minus the arugula. Season with remaining salt and pepper; mix gently. Let marinate 30 minutes in refrigerator. Drain, reserving marinade; toss with couscous.

Mound four separate piles of arugula on plates. Lightly dress with reserved marinade. Place couscous-shrimp mixture atop arugula; garnish and serve. *Yield: 4 servings*

### Salad of Goat Cheese, Beet, Fennel, and Citrus Vinaigrette

**Time:** 1 1/2 hours; **active time:** 45 minutes

- 1 large beet
- 1 bulb fennel, cut into strips
- 2 oranges plus 2 teaspoons grated orange zest
- 1 to 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest
- 1 to 2 teaspoons grated lime zest
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/4 cup white balsamic vinegar (if not available, substitute regular balsamic vinegar)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 cups mixed greens
- 6 ounces goat cheese, crumbled, divided into 4 equal portions

Preheat oven to 400°. Wash beet well, then wrap in foil and roast in oven 1 hour, or until easily pierced with knife. Cool, then wrap in paper towel and rub to remove skin. Quarter beet and slice each quarter into 8 thin slices from the root end to the stem end; set aside. Quarter fennel bulb; remove core. Slice each quarter very thinly and set aside. Using a sharp knife, completely remove the skin of the 2 oranges and cut into segments over a bowl, reserving any juice.

*For the vinaigrette:* Place grated citrus zests in a bowl with mustard, vinegar, salt, pepper, and 1/4 cup reserved orange juice. Whisk, incorporating oil slowly. Check



*Salad of Goat Cheese, Beet, Fennel, and Citrus Vinaigrette*

seasoning and adjust as desired.

*To assemble the salad:* Mix greens together with orange segments, beets, and fennel; toss with 1/2 cup vinaigrette. Taste and add more vinaigrette as desired. Divide salad mixture evenly among 4 plates. Top with goat cheese and serve.

*Yield: 4 servings; dressing: 1 1/3 cups*

### Warm Salad of Spring Vegetable Medley, Poached Egg, and Pancetta Vinaigrette

**Time:** 45 minutes; **active time:** 40 minutes

*This salad will shine as a main dish for lunch or a light dinner. Some markets sell precooked fava beans; if you can't find them, buy them in the pod, then blanch both the beans and the asparagus by boiling in salted water 2 to 3 minutes, until crisp-tender, then plunging immediately into cold water to stop the cooking.*

- 4 eggs
- Pinch of salt
- Dash of vinegar
- Ice water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 bunch scallions sliced diagonally into 1-inch pieces
- 6 ounces whole fresh morels
- 1 teaspoon minced shallot
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 cup peeled, blanched fava beans
- 10 spears asparagus, sliced diagonally into 1-inch pieces and blanched
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 4 cups mixed greens

#### VINAIGRETTE:

- 4 ounces pancetta, diced
- 1 shallot, finely diced
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 1/4 cup sherry vinegar
- 3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

*To poach the eggs:* Bring 2 quarts water to a boil. Add a pinch of salt and a dash of vinegar; turn heat down to a light simmer. Crack and drop each egg into boiling water; poach about 3 minutes. Remove with slotted spoon and place in ice water.

*To make the vinaigrette:* In a skillet, brown pancetta over medium heat until crispy, about 8 minutes. Place shallot, mustard, honey, and vinegar in a bowl; whisk gently. Next, add oil, whisking as you go. Then add half the pancetta and season with salt and pepper to taste.

*For the vegetable medley:* In a nonstick pan, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil. Add scallions and cook 1 minute. Add the morels, shallot, and garlic; sauté over low heat 3 to 5 minutes, until soft. Add the fava beans and asparagus and cook an additional 30 seconds. Season with salt and pepper. Remove from heat. Gently reheat eggs by returning to hot water for a few seconds. Toss mixed greens with vegetables and one-third of the vinaigrette; divide between four plates. Place 1 egg on each plate, garnish with remaining pancetta, and finish with extra dressing if needed. *Yield: 4 servings*