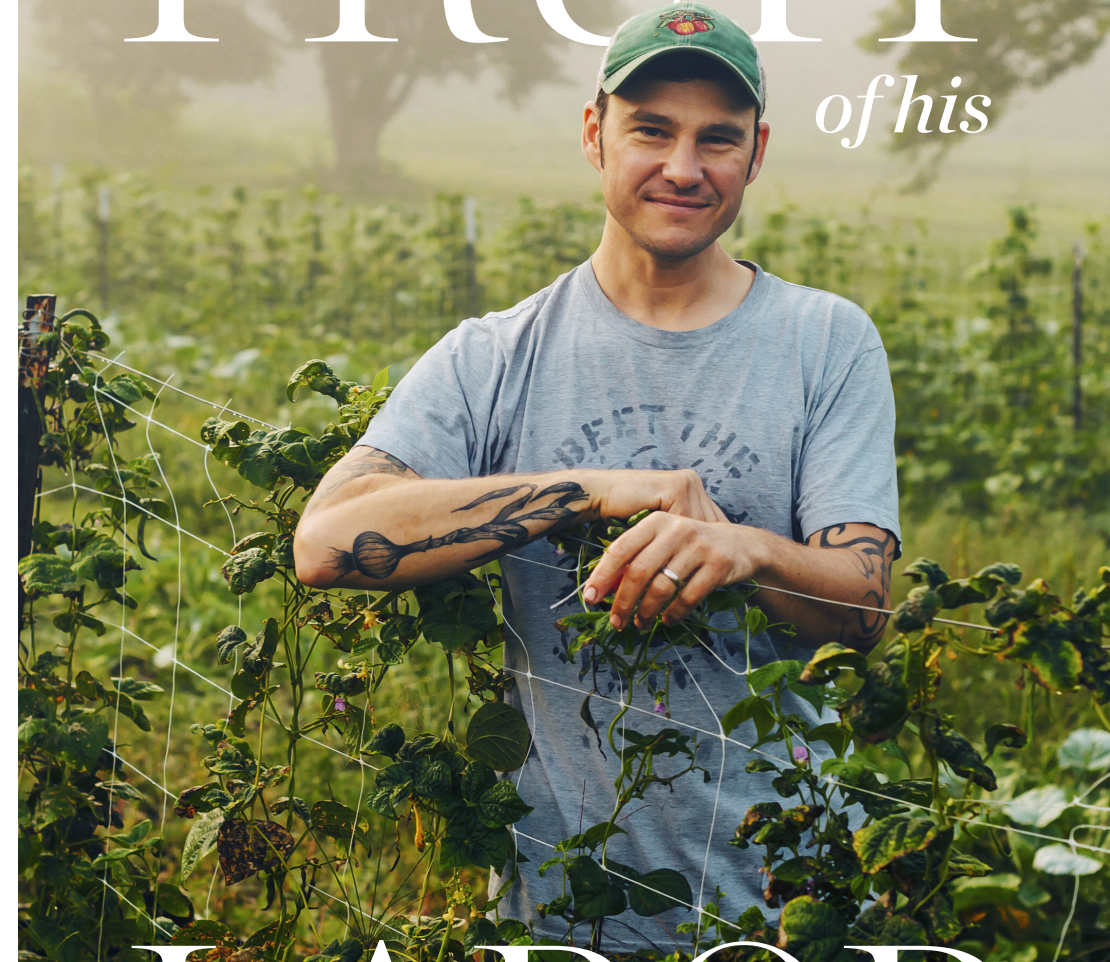




Greens with Tomatoes, Peaches & Raspberry Vinaigrette, p.84

The FRUIT of his



LABOR

Chef Ben Bebenroth has the ultimate connection to outstanding ingredients—he's growing his own on a farm nestled inside a national park in the hilly countryside of northeast Ohio.

By JILLIAN KRAMER • Recipes by BEN BEBENROTH
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When chef Ben Bebenroth first laid eyes on what is now his farm, it was anything but pleasing to the eye: The land was overgrown with thicket, fallen logs and towering grass. It had succumbed to disarray when its owner could no longer care for the property. But past the disorder, the Cleveland-based chef saw what others couldn't: A trash-strewn barn that could host dinners, quiet fields that would buzz with beehives, and empty plots ready to be planted with rare chestnut trees.

Bebenroth had long tackled improbable farming projects, without formal farming experience. When he launched his company, Spice Catering, he grew carrots and herbs in a 400-square-foot patch in his grandmother's backyard. Later, he planted 3,000 heads of garlic in his front yard.

Then in 2013, Bebenroth leased the approximately 13 acres of land outside of Cleveland and named it Spice Acres, a nod to his catering company. To clear the 8-foot-tall weeds, he bred heritage hogs, which gobbled them up with glee. He filled the unused fields with 300 hens, to provide him with eggs. He built beehives. He cleaned out the barn, replacing broken equipment and trash with long dining tables and string lights.

Today, the farm little resembles its first years in operation. It blends seamlessly with its surroundings, fringed with pines, dotted with shrubs and colored by wildflowers. While the hens and pigs provided insect control and plenty of nitrogen-rich manure, the task of caring for them was too great for Bebenroth and his wife and two children, who live on and work the farm with him. "That was the bane of my existence with my kids," he laughs. "They hated washing eggs so bad." The pigs were traded in for purple passion asparagus. Raspberries, blueberries, horseradish, gooseberries and mushrooms—1,600 logs of shiitake mushrooms, to be exact—have replaced the hens.

While there's been a burgeoning grow-your-own movement among chefs over the years, with restaurateurs acquiring farms of their own, Bebenroth's situation is unique. Spice Acres is nestled inside Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), between the Ohio cities of Cleveland and Akron. It's one of just a handful of national parks that actively leases to farmers. Created in 1999 to preserve the rural character of the park, CVNP's Countryside Initiative rehabbed more than a dozen historic

farmsteads within the park that had fallen into disrepair. Then it solicited proposals from farmers for sustainable management plans. As part of their federal lease, each farmer must engage with the public, which may mean participating in the park's weekly farmers' market, offering tours of their property or hosting a farmstand. In return, the initiative partners with the National Park Service to provide farmers with education and resources.

For Bebenroth, hooking up with CVNP created an opportunity to provide both produce and inspiration for himself and his chefs. Last year, during the farm's growing season, they walked the fields to determine what the catering company would offer clients. "It's a blend of catastrophe and creativity," Bebenroth explains. When flea beetles munch through rows of arugula, for example, the chefs whirl it into purees and pesto. "We can't just till it in," Bebenroth says. "We paid for the seed. We babied it. We watered it."

And while the farm primarily provides produce for Spice Catering, in years past it also had plenty of opportunities for visitors to interact on its land. Its Plated Landscape dinners highlighted in-season produce, and pick-your-own opportunities drew hundreds of people. The COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily halted those on-site activities, and catering contracts have been terminated through much of the summer. Bebenroth is still working the land, but only planting about 10% of what he did last year. Much of that produce will go to a local school system for its food program. As for what's next, Bebenroth only knows a couple of things for sure: "I still want to provide local, nutrient-dense food to northeast Ohio, but I don't want to have to figure it out in a hurry," he says. And when COVID-19 is in the rearview mirror, he adds, "this is the kind of place people will want to be."

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» In the spring, these Spice Acres greenhouses teem with vegetable starts that later get transplanted to the fields.



Shaved Summer Squash Salad with Ricotta Salata & Charred Fennel

ACTIVE: 30 min TOTAL: 30 min

While spinach is a good leafy substitute for the sorrel in this salad, Ben Bebenroth sometimes uses thinly sliced raw rhubarb to mimic sorrel's tangy flavor.

- 1¼ pounds small zucchini and/or summer squash, trimmed
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 4 baby fennel bulbs or 1 large fennel bulb, fronds reserved for garnish
- 1 cup baby sorrel (see *Tip*, page 105) or spinach
- ½ cup fresh opal basil leaves, chopped
- ½ cup flat-leaf parsley leaves, chopped
- ¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh chives
- 1-2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 ounces shaved ricotta salata cheese
- ½ teaspoon flaky sea salt
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper

1. Preheat grill to medium-high
2. Using a mandoline or vegetable peeler, thinly slice squash lengthwise until you encounter the seeds. Discard the seedy centers. Place the squash ribbons in a large bowl and toss with 1 tablespoon oil.
3. If using a large fennel bulb, cut in half lengthwise; leave baby fennel whole. Oil the grill rack. Grill the fennel, flipping occasionally, until tender and slightly charred, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a rimmed baking sheet and drizzle with 1 tablespoon oil. When cool enough to handle, cut crosswise into ¾-inch-wide pieces.
4. Add the fennel to the squash along with sorrel (or spinach), basil, parsley, chives and lemon juice to taste; toss. Sprinkle the salad with ricotta salata, salt, pepper and fennel fronds, if using. Drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil.

SERVES 6: 1½ cups each

Cal 147 Fat 10g (sat 3g) Chol 2mg Carbs 10g
Total sugars 5g (added 0g) Protein 5g Fiber 4g
Sodium 250mg Potassium 716mg.

Greens with Tomatoes, Peaches & Raspberry Vinaigrette

ACTIVE: 30 min TOTAL: 30 min

Here's a salad to toss together during the dog days of summer, when peaches and tomatoes are both at their best. Use a combination of lettuces that have different textures and flavors—a tender, more buttery variety with something more substantial and peppery, for instance. (Photo: page 80.)

- 2 medium heirloom tomatoes, cut into wedges
- 2 medium peaches, sliced
- ½ teaspoon salt, divided
- 3 slices bacon (4 ounces), cut into 1-inch dice
- 3 tablespoons raspberry vinegar
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 teaspoon whole-grain mustard
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- ¼ cup sunflower oil
- 8 fresh anise hyssop leaves (see *Tip*, page 105), torn, or 5 fresh mint leaves and 1 teaspoon chopped fennel fronds
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 10 cups packed torn mixed lettuce (8 ounces)
- Halved cherry tomatoes for garnish

1. Lay tomatoes and peaches on a rimmed baking sheet and sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon salt. Set aside for 10 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, cook bacon in a medium skillet over medium-low heat until crisp, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate to drain.
3. Whisk vinegar, honey, mustard, pepper and the remaining ¼ teaspoon salt in a large bowl. Slowly whisk in oil. Bruise anise hyssop (or mint and fennel fronds) and thyme with the side of a chef's knife and add to the bowl. Pour the juices from the tomatoes and peaches into the bowl and whisk briefly. Add lettuce and toss to coat.
4. Arrange the lettuce on a serving platter, leaving any extra dressing behind. Add the tomatoes and peaches to the remaining dressing in the bowl and toss to coat. Top the greens with the tomatoes and peaches, any leftover dressing and the bacon. Garnish with cherry tomatoes, if desired.

SERVES 6: 2 cups each

Cal 155 Fat 12g (sat 2g) Chol 7mg Carbs 9g Total sugars 6g (added 1g) Protein 4g Fiber 2g Sodium 328mg Potassium 318mg.

Spicy Eggplant & Shishitos

ACTIVE: 25 min TOTAL: 25 min

Bebenroth likes to make this sauté with Ichiban eggplant, which is a long, slender variety with thin skin that he grows on his farm.

- 2 tablespoons mirin
- 1½ tablespoons white miso
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon sake
- 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon reduced-sodium tamari or soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 4 tablespoons grapeseed oil, divided
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 6 shishito peppers, seeded and chopped
- 1 medium eggplant, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 2 heads baby bok choy, chopped
- ½ cup unsalted raw cashews, toasted and coarsely chopped

- ¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced

1. Whisk mirin, miso, ginger, honey, sake, sesame oil, tamari (or soy sauce), pepper and crushed red pepper in a small bowl; set aside.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon grapeseed oil in a large flat-bottom wok or cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and shishitos; cook, stirring often, until the onion is translucent, about 3 minutes. Add the remaining 3 tablespoons grapeseed oil and eggplant; cook, stirring often, until the eggplant is tender, 8 to 10 minutes.
3. Add bok choy and the reserved miso mixture; cook, stirring frequently, until the bok choy is tender-crisp, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a serving bowl. Sprinkle with cashews, cilantro and scallions.

SERVES 8: ½ cup each

Cal 197 Fat 12g (sat 2g) Chol 0mg Carbs 19g Total sugars 10g (added 2g) Protein 6g Fiber 5g Sodium 291mg Potassium 808mg.



» Bebenroth looks forward to hosting events like this Plated Landscape dinner on the farm again one day.

S'mores Pie

ACTIVE: 45 min TOTAL: 5½ hrs

TO MAKE AHEAD: Prepare through Step 4 and refrigerate for up to 2 days. **EQUIPMENT:** 9-inch pie pan (not deep-dish), candy thermometer *This pie has everything you love about the classic bonfire treat—a graham cracker crust, smooth milk chocolate filling and a pillowy, toasty meringue that evokes all the feels of marshmallows—without getting smoke in your eyes.*

- 6 ounces graham crackers
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 12 ounces milk chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup nonfat evaporated milk
- 2 large egg whites, pasteurized if desired
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons water

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Place graham crackers and cinnamon in a food processor; process into crumbs. Transfer to a medium bowl, add butter and stir until the crumbs are evenly moistened. Press the mixture evenly into the bottom and up the sides of a 9-inch pie pan (not deep-dish).
3. Bake the crust for 5 minutes. Let cool completely, about 15 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, place chocolate in a medium bowl. Heat evaporated milk in a small saucepan

over medium-high heat, whisking occasionally, until it just comes to a simmer. Pour the milk over the chocolate. Let stand for 30 seconds. Whisk until smooth. Pour the filling into the crust. Refrigerate until the filling is firm, at least 4 hours or up to 2 days.

5. Place egg whites in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Combine sugar and water in a small saucepan. Attach a candy thermometer and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. When the syrup starts to boil, begin beating the egg whites at medium speed. Cook the sugar syrup, undisturbed, until it reaches 245°F.

6. When the syrup is at 245° and the egg whites have formed medium peaks, slowly pour the syrup into the egg whites while beating on medium speed. Continue beating until the meringue cools to room temperature, about 4 minutes.

7. Spread the meringue decoratively over the chilled pie. Brown it using a kitchen torch or broil the pie about 6 inches from the heat source, rotating it occasionally, until browned, about 2 minutes. Let the pie stand for 10 minutes before slicing.

SERVES 12: 1 piece each

Cal 280 Fat 13g (sat 7g) Chol 15mg Carbs 36g Total sugars 26g (added 19g) Protein 5g Fiber 2g Sodium 120mg Potassium 211mg.

WINE PAIRINGS

SHAVED SUMMER SQUASH SALAD WITH RICOTTA SALATA & CHARRED FENNEL

2018 Obrigado Nortico Alvarinho, Portugal (\$14)

KOJI-BRINED PORK SHOULDER

2018 Mirouze Rouze Rouge, Languedoc, France (\$20)

S'MORES PIE

Terra d'Oro Zinfandel Port, Amador County, California (\$23)

Raspberry Tarragon Shrub

ACTIVE: 15 min **TOTAL:** 1¼ hrs (plus 24 hrs standing time)

TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate shrub (Steps 1-3) for up to 1 month.

Here, tangy raspberries and tarragon transform into a shrub—a sweet vinegar-based syrup that's been around since Colonial times. Mix into sparkling water for a refreshing sip. Makes enough for 20 drinks. (Photo: pages 83 & 103.)

- 1 pound raspberries, plus more for garnish
- 1½ cups sugar
- 8 sprigs fresh tarragon, plus more for garnish
- 1½ cups red-wine vinegar
- Ice
- ½ cup chilled sparkling water

1. Combine raspberries, sugar and tarragon in a large nonreactive pot, such as stainless steel. Let stand at room temperature, stirring occasionally, for 1 hour.

2. Cook the raspberry mixture over medium heat until starting to simmer, about 5 minutes. Add vinegar and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until it comes to a bare simmer (do not let it boil), 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Cover with cheesecloth or a clean kitchen towel and let stand at room temperature for 24 hours.

3. Remove and discard the tarragon. Strain the mixture into an airtight container. (If desired, save the pickled berries for another use;

refrigerate airtight for up to 1 week to use in salads.) Refrigerate the shrub until cold, at least 1 hour and up to 1 month.

4. To make each drink: Fill glass with ice. Add 1½ tablespoons shrub and top with sparkling water. Stir once and garnish with fresh raspberries and tarragon, if desired.

SERVES 1: 6 oz. each

Cal 54 **Fat** 0g (sat 0g) **Chol** 0mg **Carbs** 13g
Total sugars 13g (added 11g) **Protein** 0g
Fiber 0g **Sodium** 2mg **Potassium** 5mg.

Koji-Brined Pork Shoulder

ACTIVE: 1¼ hrs **TOTAL:** 3¾ hrs (plus 24-36 hrs for brining)

TO MAKE AHEAD: Brine pork (Step 1) for up to 36 hours.

Shio koji is a fermented mixture of grain inoculated with mold (koji), water and salt that is used in marinades and brines. Bebenroth loves how it gives this pork shoulder funky umami flavor, while also helping to tenderize the meat. Miso, which also contains koji, is an easier-to-find substitute. Serve with Ginger Pickled Carrots (recipe follows)—their acidity balances the richness of the dish.

BRAINE & PORK

- 4 cups water
- ½ cup shio koji (see Tip, page 105) or white miso
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- ⅓ cup kosher salt
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled
- 5 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons whole peppercorns
- 4 cups ice
- 5 pounds boneless pork shoulder, trimmed and cut into 8 pieces

BRAISE

- 1 tablespoon grapeseed or canola oil
- 1 large onion, sliced
- ¼ cup water
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 15-ounce can no-salt-added whole tomatoes
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 tablespoons honey
- Chopped fresh parsley for garnish

1. To brine pork: Combine water, shio koji (or miso), brown sugar, salt, garlic, bay leaves and peppercorns in a large pot. Bring to a simmer. Cook until the sugar and salt dissolve. Transfer to a large bowl and add ice. When the ice is melted, add pork. Refrigerate for 24 to 36 hours.

2. Remove the pork from the brine (discard



brine) and let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes.

3. Preheat oven to 250°F. Pat the pork dry.

4. To braise pork: Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add half the pork and cook until browned on all sides, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a clean plate. Repeat with the remaining pork. Add onion and water to the pot and cook, scraping up any browned bits, until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in broth, tomatoes, wine and honey; bring to a simmer. Return the pork to the pot. Cover and bake until the pork is fork-tender, 2 to 3 hours.

5. Transfer the pork and vegetables to a serving dish and tent with foil to keep warm. Skim fat from the cooking liquid. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Cook until the sauce is reduced by half, 10 to 15 minutes.

6. Spoon the sauce over the pork and vegetables and sprinkle with parsley, if desired.

SERVES 12: 3 oz. pork & 3 Tbsp. sauce each
Cal 307 **Fat** 18g (sat 6g) **Chol** 92mg **Carbs** 9g
Total sugars 6g (added 4g) **Protein** 25g **Fiber** 1g
Sodium 437mg **Potassium** 417mg.

Ginger Pickled Carrots

ACTIVE: 10 min **TOTAL:** 2 hrs 40 min (including 2 hrs for brining)

TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate for up to 2 weeks. This pickling liquid gives bright flavor to carrots—try it with green beans or peppers as well.

- 14 ounces carrots
- 2 cups water
- 1 cup white-wine or cider vinegar
- ½ cup thinly sliced fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt

1. Peel carrots. Using the vegetable peeler, cut the carrots into thin ribbons. Place the carrot ribbons in a large heatproof bowl and set a fine-mesh sieve over the bowl.

2. Combine water, vinegar, ginger, sugar and salt in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Cook until the sugar and salt are dissolved. Pour the brine through the sieve, making sure the carrots are completely immersed. Cover and let cool to room temperature, about 30 minutes.

3. Transfer the carrots and brine to a clean container, cover tightly and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to 2 weeks.

SERVES 8: ¼ cup each

Cal 22 **Fat** 0g (sat 0g) **Chol** 0mg **Carbs** 5g
Total sugars 3g (added 0.2g) **Protein** 0g **Fiber** 1g
Sodium 125mg **Potassium** 162mg.

