

ON FOOD: Asparagus, leeks and other seasonal vegetables show spring has finally sprung on menus



Florence Fabricant

(May07) As dramatic as the difference between winter and spring may be, both in nature and in the kitchen, one season actually changes into the next quite gradually. But finally, it's spring in full swing.

At **Rae** in Philadelphia, crab with asparagus has been added to the spring menu as part of the American sushi plate, and matzo balls with fava beans is another addition. Chef **Daniel Stern's** other restaurant, **Gayle**, also in Philadelphia, features gazpacho with spring vegetables.

Chinatown Brasserie in New York offers spring specials, including chicken with asparagus and beef with flowering chives.

A salad of baby artichokes with fresh stracciatella cheese and mint gives a hint of springtime to the menu at **Rialto** in Boston. At presstime, Peter Hoffman, chef-owner of **Savoy** in New York, had plans to grill the season's first leeks over an open fire, Spanish style, for a feast called the Calçotada. Romesco sauce, grilled lamb chops and rosé wine round out the ritual.

Savoy also is serving a spring leek and potato soup with green garlic, and grilled heritage pork loin with crisp Tuscan potatoes, sautéed spring greens and sorrel butter.

Spring salads are on the menu at **Village** in New York, and the choices include a toss of watercress, mango and avocado with glazed pork loin; fava beans, asparagus and mâche with Maine shrimp; and dandelion greens and haricots verts with smoked duck breast.

Mandaloun, a newcomer to Redwood City, Calif., has kicked off the season with Delta asparagus wrapped in pancetta and served with orange aioli, spaghetti with baby tomatoes and fava beans.

Ramps are as much a sign of spring as artichokes and asparagus. At **Poste Moderne Brasserie** in Washington, D.C., they are pickled and served with wild boar soppressata. Sweet Maine shrimp with spring garlic is another seasonal vegetable option from this operation.

A 13-vegetable spring salad and an organic breast of chicken with spring peas and asparagus are two seasonal temptations at **Napa Valley Grille** in Los Angeles.

At Two Chefs in South Miami, spring vegetables are combined with herbs in a crab cake with an escabèche of artichokes. **Quince** in San Francisco serves wild fennel in a sardine terrine with Meyer lemon and garden lettuce and a wild nettle sformato sharing the plate.



Gazpacho with spring vegetables at Gayle in Philadelphia

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At **Martini House** in St. Helena, Calif., a shirred egg and asparagus salad comes garnished with rustic arugula, potato rösti and hollandaise sauce. Escargots are plated with ricotta and artichoke ravioli, blue foot mushrooms, peas and fried artichokes. Grilled Angus short ribs are given a whiff of springtime at Martini House with spinach and spring vegetables glazed with horseradish cream. The Kurobuta pork chop has a seasonal spin here, too, thanks to new carrots, English peas and creamed spinach with nettles.

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