

Greenfield Village chef loves herbs

How many people get to choose their herbs from three different gardens? Jim Maier, executive chef, Henry Ford Museum, Greenfield Village, can do just that.

This 29-year-old chef is busy every day planning the menus and overseeing the kitchens in the complex. He has been there five years. Everything from hot dogs to \$100-plus catered evening events, including sit-down dinners, comes under his supervision.

The day I visited, a barbecue for 300 people had taken place under a large tent.

Maier said one of the reasons he enjoys his work is because it is so diverse; something different is being done every day.

WE VISITED those three herb gardens. The first, Dr. Howard's, contains culinary and medicinal herbs, plus other plants such as rhubarb, hollyhocks, onions and horseradish.

When the horseradish plant is large enough (several years old) the roots are ground and added to whipping cream and served with beef. If a little salt and garlic are added, it makes a nice spread for roast beef on a french roll.

Mint, sage, dock, goldenrod, borage (flowers are used in salads), lemon balm, fennel, hyssop, feverfew and lovage do well together. Lovage is put in potato salads and in cold pastas. Maier uses the leaves and also the seeds.



down to earth
Marty Figley

next to the Eagle Tavern, Maier's favorite restaurant.

There are several separate beds, some heart-shaped. Chive blossoms are used to garnish salads and entrees, and the thyme flowers garnish chicken or beef plates. The basil is used in pesto base to be served with pasta.

"It's quite nice to be able to come out here in the morning and pick some fresh herbs to use," Maier said. "There's no comparison once you've used fresh, especially your tender-leaved herbs such as oregano, marjoram and basil."

"They just don't dry that well and lose a lot of flavor. Rosemary, thyme, sage, the heavier-leaved herbs will keep some of that true flavor after they're dried."

"Once you start using fresh, there is just no comparison — with fresh your end product is so much nicer."

WHEN I asked about a favorite herb, he said it's a close race between basil and thyme.

He likes basil for cold foods; basil and garlic together with some parmesan is his favorite summer "herb food." Pine nuts or unsalted sunflower seeds enhance this combination.

So much can be done with the pesto, Maier said... add more oil and make a salad dressing, use a little less oil and whip the pesto with some butter for a bread spread.

Thyme is his favorite for winter to flavor roasts and potatoes and add good seasoning to soup.

THE THIRD garden is one the general public doesn't see. It's called the Production Garden.

This is where the bulk of the herbs are grown, along with flowers suitable for drying to be used in arrangements and in the classes conducted at the Village. A group of volunteers, the Herb Associates, maintains these gardens and grows what this chef requests.

Except for two cooks he taught to care for the plants, Maier harvests the herbs himself, using scissors and removing only a third of the plant so that it doesn't go into shock. One exception is the chives; both flowers and foliage are cut completely to the ground.

As we walked and visited, every so often Maier would pick a sprig of an herb and enjoy its flavor. He truly loves these plants and cooks creatively with them.

Maier has lectured about herbs through the educational department. Brochures about all Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum programs are available.



Pungent, shiny, green basil catches Jim Maier's attention as he checks the Greenfield Village herb gardens.

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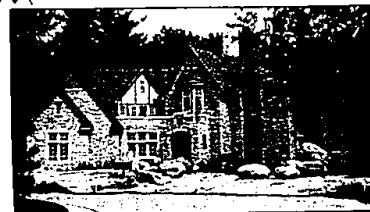
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