

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2008

We are all saddened by the death of Darina and Rory's mother Elizabeth O'Connell on April 17th 2008. May she rest in peace.

12-WEEK COURSE

Our first 12-week course of the year has just ended, with our set of 57 brilliant students off now to impress the world with their culinary proficiency. Since January, they've learned how to make pizzas in a wood oven, to distinguish between 20 varieties of salad leaves, all about the politics of raw-milk cheesemaking, have listened to talks given by visiting winemakers, made puff pastry from scratch, baked bread every day, and indulged in local pleasures from walking on the beach in Shanagarry to listening to live music at the Blackbird in Ballycotton. We'll miss them but are excited to welcome a new crop of students in April after a few short courses.

*We also have a series of **Forgotten Skills courses** coming up in the next couple of months: How to keep a few chickens in the garden, how to make homemade butter, and how to smoke your own food, for example. It's really cheering to see people interested in doing old-fashioned things again...*



Rory's one-day intensive classes at Snugboro have also met with much success (see www.rgoconnell.com for details) as have the corporate team-building classes and hen parties that we occasionally host at the school.

EDUCATIONAL



*Over the winter, we like to give the chickens free roam all over the gardens because they're so good at eating slugs and weeds (and they love it!), but now that we're planting seeds and seedlings, we'll have to rein them in slightly or they'll eat all of those, too. January's meeting of the **Cork Free Choice Consumers Group** (they happen on the last Thursday of every month at the Crawford Gallery in Cork) dealt with *How To Keep Your Own Hens*, and drew a standing-room-only crowd. Cheesemaker and hen-keeper Giana Ferguson, former poultry instructress Mary Taafe, Myrtle Allen and myself debated de-worming remedies, the ostensible benefits of garlic and cod liver oil, and the best ways to keep a flock healthy. All in all a vibrant and informative evening.*

FARM NEWS

*It's springtime and tiny, squinty-eyed animals all are being born all over the farm. One of our sows recently gave birth to **14 piglets**, and we hatched a **litter of chicks** from eggs we'd put in the incubator a few weeks before so the students could observe the whole process. We are still in heavy discussions as to what comes first, the chicken or the egg! And we have put another round of eggs in the **incubator**.*

*We added **100 pullets** to the henhouse in early January, and testament to their thriving is the constant crowing we can hear just outside the school doors. Some of them are even thriving a bit excessively—the students have had to break up a few cock-fights!*

*At the moment, only one of the **Jersey cows** is giving milk, but that's still plenty for our tea and we have been making yoghurt and occasionally butter with the rest of it.*

*We are very excited to be opening our own **Farm Shop** this summer. We will be selling some of our lovely produce from the gardens and glasshouses and also various soups, stews and sauces made in the Cookery School. Come along and check it out.*

GARDEN NEWS

*The garden is filled with **daffodils** of all shapes and sizes but after the long winter we are delighted to see so much colour. **Gorse flowers**, too, have lined the cliffs of Ballycotton and perfume the atmosphere there. Spring has finally sprung!*

*We have been labouring to get the garden shipshape before the big season begins, and in dry weather have been pruning shrubs, re-roofing sheds, re-arranging borders and weeding, weeding, weeding. The **compost** that's been maturing all winter has been added to several vegetable beds in expectation of sunshine and warmth and the windows of the glasshouses have been cleaned in order to increase light levels as much as possible. Penny Allen, who is writing our brilliant Garden Journal which you can read on the website, reports that the **broad bean seedlings** have been planted, each with a supporting cane, and that garlic is "growing away happily" in rows. New **potato leaves** have sprouted above the ridges where the plants will grow, and the new lettuces are thriving.*

*The **almond trees** have just come into flower, but we'll need some bees to pollinate them if we hope to see fruit, and it's still a bit cold. Some of the other fruit trees on the farm and surrounding areas have blossomed, too, but the apple trees are still bare.*

INDIA

We have just come back from an incredible 3 weeks in India, our third trip. This time again, we ate loads of samosas, bhajis, pakoras, egg toasts with chopped onions,

chillis and fresh coriander, moghlai parathas (stuffed with mince), cauliflower fritters with chilli powder and turmeric, fresh watermelon, pineapple, pomegranate and mango juices, and of course loads of dhal and spicy masala chai. And of course we went back to the school we have been helping in the tribal areas of Rajasthan, near Udaipur, to see the classroom we built with money from the **Darina Allen India Fund**, where the whole village turned out to welcome us, complete with music, singing, speeches, incredible hospitality and many blessings.

BOOK WORK

Work on my **Forgotten Skills** book is progressing—the dairy chapter is nearly finished; next, we attack the pig! There is so much to include, and such a hunger amongst people for information, that this book is proving to be quite a massive undertaking. We've been doing research on the health benefits of unpasteurised milk, checking foragers' seasonality calendars, and testing recipes for junket, buttermilk pannacotta, cheesecake and the like. I am thrilled that so many people are hungry for information about all these "forgotten skills" and happy to see the classes we offer on keeping chickens, making cheese and beekeeping consistently packed.

ACCOLADES

West Cork cheesemakers **Bill Hogan** and **Sean Ferry** were recently celebrated by the *Observer Food Monthly* for their steadfastness in their struggle with the Irish government over their raw-milk cheese.

I was really honoured as well to receive a **Eurotoques** Lifetime Achievement Award for 2007 from the European Community of Cooks. And a few weeks ago, we had a rousing visit from some of the top Indian journalists and an accompanying TV crew, all of whom loved their time in Ireland.

Finally, on April Fool's Day, Myrtle Allen and I were featured on Seoige & O'Shea's television program "**Relative Values**," which looks at the family lives of different Irish people. The program is on RTE.

STUDENT NEWS

Our former student **Tommi Miers** has been honoured with the *Observer Food Monthly*'s "Best Cheap Place to Eat" award for her new London restaurant, **Wahaca**, which strives to serve honestly sourced, unadorned Mexican food.

Also, former student **Ann Mulligan**, who with her husband runs the award winning B&B An Bohreen in Dungarvan, has published the **Irish B&B Cookbook**, a collection of the recipes both traditional and unique.

FARMERS MARKET



After several weeks of abominable weather, the **Midleton Farmers Market** is finally coming into its own again. We haven't had surplus eggs to sell, but the breads, biscuits, jams, jellies, and soups made by Julia and the students are always appreciated, as well as the ever-popular salad greens, plus also Jerusalem artichokes, kale, spinach, and now, as the season opens, wild garlic, nettles and other spring foods.

COMING UP:



We are very much looking forward to the **Taste of Ireland** festivals coming up in June. **Taste of Dublin**, a four-day celebration of fine food and drink set in Iveagh Gardens from the 12th to the 15th of June, kicks off the festivities, with 35,000 visitors expected. We'll be teaching people at our cookery school stand during all four days, so come by and say hello. The **Taste of Cork** follows, at the Cork City Gaol from the 27th to the 29th June. See www.tastefestivals.ie to book tickets for either, or better yet, both of these events!

And we are **REALLY** excited about the **Terra Madre Ireland** event we are planning in Waterford with Bord Bia (a historic first!) from **4th-7th of September**. Artisans, food lovers, chefs, journalists, food scientists, and Slow Food delegates from all over the country—indeed, the world—will be converging at the Waterford Institute for Technology for what will certainly be an illuminating three days. We've planned a medley of barbecues, brunches, farmers markets, music, workshops and discussions are still getting more on the go all the time. Planning the logistics of transporting, feeding, informing, entertaining, and coordinating 1200-1500 attendees is proving to be quite the challenge! We are definitely still looking for volunteers if you're interested; see www.terramadreibelreland.com for information about the event.

Don't miss **Trish Deseine's** first of her two part cookery series every Wednesday on RTE 1 at 7:30pm. Ulster born Trish is absolutely passionate about French food and has published several cookery books.

Those of you who would like the opportunity to meet Trish might want to join us - when she comes as our Guest Chef here at the cookery school - on her one day course 'Trish's Paris Kitchen' on Monday 15th September. You can book this on our [website](#).



WHAT'S IN SEASON:

Alexanders. A green weed that grows abundantly by the roadsides and is speckled with little yellow flowers. Pick the young stems and steam them gently, perhaps coating them in butter when done. Or chop them and add them to stocks and stews. They're terrific with seafood dishes, too.

Sorrel. You can recognize sorrel by its characteristic little ears pointing down away from the stem and its lemony smell and flavour. Use raw in salads, add to your potato soups, or throw it in meat or fish sauces.

Nettles. If you can get past touching them (use gloves!) nettles are delicious—just make sure you eat them cooked! Pick the young plants and the tops of the older ones. Cook them like spinach, and maybe add a little nutmeg.

Morels. March is the best time to go hunting for these delicious wrinkly brown mushrooms; go looking in pine forests, on sandy soil or ground that has been burned. Get all the sand and bugs out of the lobes, and cut them in half to make sure nothing's growing inside. Cook it with cream and serve it on toast!

Rhubarb. Actually a vegetable but prepared as fruit, rhubarb has long, pink stems with small leaves. Forced or early rhubarb needs very brief cooking and some sweetening with sugar. Use it in pies, fools, sorbet or ice cream.

Radishes. This vegetable has an ancient history and has been grown everywhere from the Mediterranean to the Orient, giving us loads of different varieties from the white radish (daikon) to the black. Look for bright green leaves, which indicate a crisp texture and peppery flavour. Excellent raw or in salads.

Parsley. It's hard to believe that parsley has a season, but it does, and that's now! It comes in flat-leaf and curly varieties and is ideal sautéed with strong flavours like garlic and onion, or as a garnish. Ironically, its ubiquity means that people take it for granted, but it's an under-rated and extraordinarily versatile herb.



RECIPE: WILD GARLIC SOUP

Wild garlic is in season this time of year and its aromas have been perfuming the school in salads, soups and everywhere else we can think to put it.

A few different plants go by the name "wild garlic," and although they can be used interchangeably in cooking with subtle variations in flavour, they are indeed different species. The most common, *Allium ursinum*, also known as **ransomes**, is a relative of the chive plant, has flat edible leaves, little white flowers, and grows profusely near riverbanks. The **three-cornered leek**, or *Allium triquetum*, has an erect triangular stem with white flowers. Finally, wild leeks (*Allium tricoccum*), also known as **ramps**, have scallion-like bulbs and broad green leaves.

Both the bulbs and leaves of wild garlic are used in this soup and the flowers are divine sprinkled over the top of each soup bowl.

1 ½ ozs (45g/generous ¼ stick) butter
5 ozs (140g/1 cup) peeled and chopped potatoes

4 ozs (110g/1 cup) peeled and chopped onion
salt and freshly ground pepper
1 ½ pint (900ml/3 ¾ cups) water or home-made chicken stock or vegetable stock
½ pint (300ml/1 ¼ cups) creamy milk
5 ozs (150g/3 cups) chopped wild garlic leaves

Garnish: Wild garlic flowers

Melt the butter in heavy bottomed saucepan, when it foams, add the potatoes and onions and toss them until well coated. Sprinkle with salt and freshly ground pepper. Cover and sweat on a gentle heat for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile prepare the wild garlic leaves. When the potato and onion base is almost soft but not coloured, add the stock and milk, bring to the boil and cook until the potatoes and onions are fully cooked. Add the wild garlic and boil with the lid off for 4-5 minutes approx. until the wild garlic is cooked. Do not overcook or the soup will lose its fresh green colour. Puree the soup in a liquidiser or food processor. Taste and correct seasoning. Serve sprinkled with a few wild garlic flowers.

Also: think about using wild garlic in mash or soda bread or pesto!

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