

Not Your Basic Bean Counter

June 2016



From The Desk Of... *Rhoda Gordon*

Who knew that my dad was a pioneer of what is now a passionate movement to stop food waste? Celebrity chefs are cooking up dumpster ingredients for gala events and whole cookbooks are being written about how to use vegetables “root to stalk”. National Geographic magazine, March 2016, had a story on “waste not, want not”, featuring the efforts of a young, charismatic Brit who is out to feed the planet, one dumpster bin at a time. As a teenager, he’d collected thrown out food from local shops to feed his pigs and chickens, and some of it looked good enough to eat—so he did, every morning for breakfast. Now, after producing a BBC documentary and then a book, *Waste*, he has launched free public feasts in more than 30 cities that are made from orphaned food.

In the late 1970’s, my dad had the same idea—albeit on a much smaller scale. He got permission to pick up all the jettisoned produce at McKay’s and the Little Farmer’s Market, and started a regular rescue route. His battered red pickup, the back loaded up with bulging and bungeed plastic garbage cans, would pull up to his improvised sorting area—a large piece of plywood set on a couple of sawhorses—and the fun would begin. His assortment of farm animals would immediately start braying, mooing, baaing, clucking and grunting for their fair share, and they were never disappointed.

The big surprise, though: a lot of the produce was still perfectly good people food. Melons with small bruised dents were at their sweet peak, peaches and nectarines ditto; grapes just needed to be sorted out. My mom started dehydrating ripe bananas into sweet leathery goodness, and turning grapes into raisins. All this good stuff needed to be shared! So Dad started a second route, driving his bounty around to young families on tight budgets.

Tristram Smith, the young Brit, would’ve found a soul mate in my dad, the retired teacher. They could’ve shared a glass of Dad’s apple cider, pushed to the back of the fridge until it fermented, or a bowl of his dumpster-gleaned fruit compote, topped off with whipped cream.

In that spirit, I’ve been looking more closely at roots, stems and leaves before automatically tossing them. I haven’t tried making carrot-top pesto yet, or pasta from cauliflower stems—but, hey, maybe! Here’s a corn chowder though, that uses the cobs to make a tasty broth.

Corn Cob Chowder

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- 4-5 small Yukon gold potatoes, scrubbed and cut in large chunks (peeling optional)
- 6 fresh corn cobs, with corn cut off
- Corn, cut from cobs
- 2-3 poblano or Anaheim chilies, seeded and diced
- 2 small yellow onions, diced
- ½ cup diced celery
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 cups milk
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme (or a good pinch of dried)
- 2 bay leaves
- Olive oil, as needed
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Cayenne pepper or paprika, to taste
- Garnish suggestions: cooked and crumbled bacon, sliced green onions or chives, a spoonful of basil pesto, grated Cheddar



Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Put potatoes and corn cobs in a large pot with a pinch of salt, and add water to *barely* cover. Bring to a boil and then simmer, low, for about 30 minutes. The potatoes will be very soft.

Meanwhile, toss the corn kernels and diced chilies with 2 tablespoons olive oil and a big pinch of salt. Spread out on a baking sheet, single layer, and bake until the corn kernels are beginning to brown; start checking after 20 minutes.

In a large saucepan, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat. Add chopped onion and ½ teaspoon salt and sauté until onions are translucent. Add diced celery, red bell pepper and garlic and continue cooking, stirring, for another 5 minutes.

Strain the corn cob broth into a large sieve, set over the top of the sautéed vegetables. Put the potatoes in a bowl and mash them roughly with a fork. Using a large spoon, scrape the corn cobs over the same bowl to get every last bit of corn goodness, then dump contents in with the sautéed vegetables and broth.

Add roasted corn and chilies, thyme, rosemary and bay leaf to the soup. Stir in the milk and bring slowly to a simmer (do not boil), for about 25-30 minutes, until thickened. Season to taste with salt and pepper and cayenne pepper or paprika. Pick out the bay leaves and any herb stems and serve, topped with garnish or garnishes of your choice.