



Local Harvest

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Features

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Local Farm Profile: J. Steckle Heritage Homestead

Imagine a working farm located in the south end of Kitchener in the heart of an industrial basin. One certainly would not expect to find such a treasure as the J. Steckle Heritage Homestead at 811 Bleams Road. Settled in 1833 and designated as a heritage property by the City of Kitchener in 1983, the unique farm is dedicated to providing hands-on farm experience and educational programming to children and their families. It teaches youth about environmental stewardship while offering valuable insight into the lives of early settlers of the Waterloo Region.

The homestead is named in honour of John Steckle, a farmer, weaver and pastor of Mennonite faith, originally from Switzerland. He and his wife Esther settled the farm and it stayed in the family for generations. In 1978 Dr. Jean Steckle purchased the homestead and the remaining ten acres. A decade later in 1988, a non profit organization was established to preserve the site for recreation and education. Since then the Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundation has funded several of Steckle's preservation projects and many of the original buildings remain intact. Today, the site encompasses 15 acres of land and offers a full compliment of programs that teach participants about nature, farm life and heritage.

Executive Director, Valerie Green says that the common goal of the various programs is "respect for the land and each other". This theme is rooted in Mennonite traditions of sharing, teamwork and mutual respect. "We seek to educate kids about where their food comes from and how it is grown, focussing on hands-on cooperative learning," says Green. "Ultimately, we are trying to bring out the best in people," she adds. Fittingly, it is the exceptional volunteer commitment at Steckle that makes this all possible.



A youth harvests a cabbage at Steckle.

Amongst the many offerings at Steckle are curriculum-based programs designed for children aged 3-16 running throughout September and October as well as in the spring. Some of the themes include Fall Harvest, where students explore the on-site pumpkin patch, corn field and apple orchard while learning about nutrition, healthy living and Waterloo County Pioneers.

During the summer months Steckle offers an *Agriventure Farm Camp* where youngsters can learn about gardening, harvesting produce, cooking and taking care of farm animals. There is also an LIT (leadership in training) program for youth aged 13-16. Complimenting the various programs is an on-site *Market Stand* running Tuesdays and Fridays 3:30-4:30 p.m. from July to November. The October stand features fresh brown eggs, potatoes, onions, peppers, squash, pumpkins, gourds, fall



Local Farm Profile continued

harvest decorations, and plenty of wonderful winter cabbage!

In previous years Steckle has hosted *Family Fun Days* and *Heritage Haunted Barn* events throughout the month of October but this year they are conducting building maintenance and bringing in much-needed water and sewage lines to the farm. “We are also in the midst of a fundraising initiative as we strive to raise money for capital projects and strengthen partnerships within the Waterloo Region” says Green adding that they plan to bring back the much-loved events in 2010.



The J. Steckle Heritage Homestead offers a variety of programs to children and families from May to October.

A trip to J. Steckle Heritage Homestead allows visitors to step back in time. The old farm house currently houses office space for the staff while the original ‘Bank Barn’ is the site for much of the programming. In addition, there is the ‘Honey House’ which serves as the environmental learning room as well as the heritage teaching kitchen where youngsters learn to cook. The various growing fields and orchard allow students to learn about sustainable agricultural practices

and environmental stewardship. “Our young participants experience an enormous sense of pride when they have grown, harvested and prepared their own food,” says Green.

To commemorate the opening of the new teaching kitchen in 2001 a special Steckle cookbook was published. It contains an interesting collection of recipes featuring wholesome local foods, many of which have been passed down through the Steckle family. The cookbook is entitled *More Steckle Family Favourites from Then and Now* and is available for \$10.

The J. Steckle Heritage Homestead is a reminder of days gone by. Its rich array of offerings connects us with not only with our local food, but also with our past. It is an oasis in the middle of the city and a true gem within Waterloo Region.

For more information about J. Steckle Heritage Homestead visit www.steckleheritagehomestead.ca or call 519-748-4690. Please note that the property is not open to the general public. ♦



Finding Local Cabbage in Waterloo Region

Foodlink's 2009 *Buy Local! Buy Fresh!* Map features a number of farms close by that that grow and sell cabbage. Please call for hours and availability.



J. Steckle Heritage Homestead

811 Bleams Rd. Kitchener
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www.stecklehomestead.ca



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About Kraut: The Story of Cabbage

The story of cabbage is a journey into our earliest attempts to take a native plant and change it into something more desirable to the human palate. Thousands of years ago, people around the Mediterranean developed a fondness for wild mustard (*Brassica oleracea*), a plant that resembles modern canola. It would have been noted, from time to time, that some plants had larger edible leaves than others. And, so with no long term goal in mind, people began to collect the seeds of the leafier plants and sow them in their gardens. Over time, this resulted in taller, larger-leafed plants that gave rise to what we know today as kale, *Brassica oleracea acephala*, which translates to mean “cabbage of the vegetable garden without a head.”

While kale continued to be grown and enjoyed, people began to fancy plants with a tighter grouping of tender young leaves at the top, leaves that were so much sweeter than the tougher exterior leaves. With thoughts of tender greens tossed in vinegar and olive oil dancing in their heads, people would save the seeds of these particular plants for the following season’s garden. As generation after generation of these plants were grown, the bud of tender leaves would gradually grow into a larger “head” that would ultimately dominate the brassica plant. *Brassica oleracea capitata*, or “cabbage of the veg-

etable garden with a head” is believed to have been in full production by the 1st century AD and would have resembled today’s modern white cabbage.

The word cabbage likely originates from the Norman word, “caboché” meaning head. Today, we find three major varieties: green (or white), red and savoy. While both green and red cabbages have smooth textured leaves, those of the savoy are more ruffled and yellowish-green in color. All cabbages tend to be darker on the outside than the inside because the inner leaves are hidden from the sunlight. Red and green cabbages have a more defined taste and crunchy texture as compared to Savoy cabbage’s more delicate nature.

The Merits of Cabbage

Sturdy, abundant and inexpensive, cabbage is a longstanding dietary staple throughout the world. It is said that one acre of cabbage will yield more edible vegetables than any other plant. Some weeks, I have trouble envisioning how to eat up just one cabbage – a small wedge whacked off the side seems to produce a disproportionately large quantity of shredded leaves. It is obvious, therefore, why so many people have depended and continue to depend on this vegetable as the basis of soups, stews, pickles, and sometimes even desserts throughout the year. And, it is not just because there is an endless supply of this filling brassica vegetable. It has long been known that cabbage promotes good health, but only recently do we understand why.

All brassica vegetables (also known as cruciferous vegetables because of their four-petaled flowers that look like a *crucifer*, or cross) have high levels of active phytochemicals called glucosinolates, which our bodies metabolize into powerful anti-carcinogens called isothio-



Cabbage is a great fall vegetable that is versatile, inexpensive and nutritious.

cyanates. Sulforaphane and indole-3-carbinol are two isothiocyanates that work on liver enzymes to detoxify carcinogens and induce apoptosis, the self-destruct sequence the body uses to eliminate old or cancerous cells. Furthermore, indole-3-carbinol has been shown to beneficially affect the way in which steroid hormones, including estrogen, are metabolized and the way in which the estrogen receptors on cells respond to the hormone. These actions may reduce the incidence of breast cancer.

In addition to its cancer-preventive phytonutrients, cabbage is an excellent source of vitamin C, an antioxidant that helps protect cells from harmful free radicals. The vitamin C equivalent, a measure of antioxidant capacity, of red cabbages is six to eight times higher than that of white cabbage. The antioxidant polyphenols, which are particularly abundant in red cabbage, are thought to protect against the damage caused by amyloid-beta protein that leads to Alzheimer’s disease.

One cup of raw cabbage also provides 22 calories, 0g fat, 2g dietary fiber and 85% of our vitamin K requirements.

In order to retain the nutritional benefits, proper preparation and cooking techniques



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are essential. Isothiocyanates are created by enzymes when the cabbage is sliced, but cooking denatures the exposed enzymes. To maximize the amount of phytochemicals produced, it is recommended that cabbage be sliced or chopped and left for 5-10 minutes before eating raw or lightly cooked for 5 minutes or less.

Shorter cooking times also minimize the strong odour associated with cooked cabbage. While it has been demonstrated that smell doubles when cabbage is cooked from 5 to 7 minutes, there are still many nutritional, flavour and cultural benefits from eating cabbage dishes that have been cooked for a long time. You can't go wrong if you complement Grandma's cabbage rolls with a healthy side dish of raw cabbage salad.

To really put cabbage at center stage, consider tossing a little sauerkraut into the salad. This traditional German staple was a perfect way of storing cabbage over the winter. Covered in a brine made up of its own juice and salt, raw sliced cabbage is left in a warm place for several weeks to ferment. Naturally occurring lactic acid bacteria in the cabbage work away at the sugars and create a final product rich in lactobacilli, vitamin C, and phytonutrients. Korean kimchi is similar to sauerkraut, but is usually sliced thicker and commonly includes onions, chilies, papaya, gin, minced garlic and ginger.

Any way you slice it, cabbage comes out with top marks for high nutrition and endless culinary possibilities. ♦

Classic Cabbage Rolls



What you will need:

- 12 large green cabbage leaves
- 1 1/2 pounds ground beef or pork
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 16 oz. tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice or vinegar

Method:

Pour boiling water over cabbage leaves and soak until limp, about 4 minutes.

Combine beef, rice, onion, salt, and egg and mix well. Divide mixture into 12 equal portions and place one portion on each leaf. Roll up, tuck ends in and fasten with wooden picks.

Heat oil in heavy skillet or Dutch oven and brown the cabbage rolls for 10 minutes.

Combine tomato sauce, water, brown sugar and lemon juice and add to skillet. Simmer cabbage rolls for 1 hour, covered. Serve hot. *Makes 6-8 servings*

Did You Know?

- During World War II, "kraut" was an ethnic slur for a German soldier or civilian. German cabbage (Kohl) made into a salad (Salat) became in English "cole slaw".
- In Italian, "cavolo" (cabbage) is a mildly impolite expression with a similar connotation to the English "crap."
- The French use a term of endearment, "mon chou" or "mon petit chou", equivalent to "darling" but translated literally as "my little cabbage".

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