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Summer 2016 · No. 30

ROCKY MOUNTAIN GARDENING

Living in the HIGH COUNTRY WEST

CHERYL'S BACKYARD MAKEOVER

STARTING FROM SCRATCH
AND LOVING IT! P. 20

LIVINGSTON
FOOD RESOURCE
CENTER, P. 35

CHEF CLYDE'S
KITCHEN, P. 32

HUDSON
GARDENS, P. 24

2016 PLANT
SELECT, P. 28

UPSIDE-DOWN
TOMATOES, P. 14

www.rockymountaingardening.com



Display until August 31, 2016

Photo: Don Tudor



Located north of Steamboat Springs, Home Ranch is located in the beautiful Elk River Valley

Chef Clyde's Farm Kitchen

Luxury dining at a guest ranch high in the Colorado Rockies

Gigi Ragland | Text

Drive up to Home Ranch on a summer's day and you will most likely see a pack of horseback riders approaching or returning from an Elk River Valley meadow or mountain trailhead and perhaps, within their midst, a group of hikers trekking nearby. It's what you would expect to see at a guest ranch.

But what might take you by surprise as you pull into the drive is the vast garden, a cornucopia of assorted vegetables: squash, beans, corn, leafy greens, zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes, and more, stretching out in row upon colorful row from the ranch buildings. This is the vibrant result of a very successful experiment conducted by Executive Chef Clyde Nelson and Master Gardener Adele Carlson.

At an elevation of 7,200 feet, Home Ranch is nestled within the Elk River Valley surrounded by the high mountains of The Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest in Northern Colorado with the Continental Divide and Mt. Zirkel Wilderness cutting



Photo: Jay O'Hare

through the middle. Snow can be expected at any time of the year; it's not unusual to experience frosty summers. That's why a high-country vegetable garden is a rarity—especially at a guest ranch, especially a really big garden that produces healthy yields in a short 3-month growing season with especially tasty harvests.

HAUTE CUISINE

As the only Colorado dude ranch with a membership in the prestigious Relais & Chateaux (a group of luxury restaurants and hotels), Home Ranch offers an above-average guest experience serving gourmet meals any foodie would relish. To the delight of guests, the talented kitchen staff at Home Ranch offer some of the best haute mountain cuisine in the Rockies. And now, to step it up a notch is the

Chef Clyde and his staff began planting a potager 12 years ago.

**RECIPE:
OVEN ROASTED
FALL VEGETABLES**

p. 34



Photo: Denise Jones

Chef Clyde personally serves a guest at the outdoor grill.

addition of Chef Clyde's Farm and Farm Kitchen.

Chef Clyde started his mountain garden like so many of us do, a little bit at a time. Twelve years ago he and his staff planted a small potager (the French term for kitchen vegetable garden) consisting of raised rock beds along the south side of the building near the kitchen and dining room. They started with a few rows of leafy greens: mesclun, arugula, spinach, and herbs. While you can easily find this type of restaurant potager in France, locating a ranch kitchen garden in the high-country of Colorado is well, practically non-existent.

After many years of hard work, Chef Clyde's dream of creating a garden and farm capable of producing local, sustainable, high-quality vegetables to feed guests and staff has become a reality. After a decade, the little potager garden has grown considerably. The "green" light was given in 2012 for the garden expansion, which increased the square footage of space from 1,200 square feet to eventually 4,000 square feet, including the addition of a greenhouse and a small orchard of fruit trees: cherries, plums and apples.

Exceptional, authentic fresh flavor is everything, especially to a classically trained chef who embodies a slow food aesthetic. Chef Clyde believes the high-country garden offers better tasting vegetables. "We feel that our harvest of vegetables has an intensity of flavor because of being grown at altitude," he says. A clue for guests: if something is not "above average" then it is not part of the Home Ranch experience. His passion for fresh ingredients carries over into his support of local farmers in the Western Colorado region.

HIGH ELEVATION CHALLENGES

"We see ourselves as a working model for others to learn from and then institute some of the practices in vegetable farming that we do at the Home Ranch," says Chef Clyde. "Much of the community of Clark resides at the same elevation as the ranch. Growing vegetables during a three-month season is challenging to say the least. The biggest obstacles the Home Ranch and Clark residential gardeners have to overcome is the shorter growing season, and contending with the colder nighttime temperatures in addition to balancing out the need for irrigation during low rainfall and protection from deer foraging. He explains, "We want to demonstrate that the challenges of high-altitude gardening can be overcome and we can, in turn, be very productive."

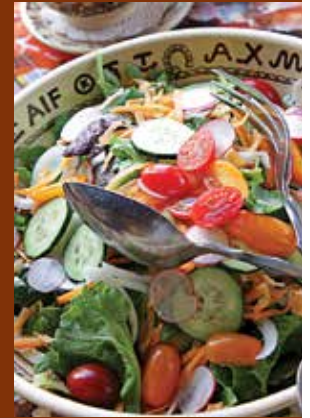
The "green team" at the ranch discovered a solution to mitigate the challenge of cold hard soil by building raised beds for warmer soil. They also use a creative system of "tire stacks" where all the potatoes are grown within the warmer soil of the "stacks." The new outdoor Farm Kitchen also helps process the harvest where there are water sinks and

HAUTE CUISINE MEAL PLANNING

Photos: Denise Jones



Ceviche and Chips



Green Salad



Elk Entrée



Dessert

SPECIAL SUMMER PROGRAMS

A special series of food programs are offered at the Home Ranch this summer featuring the delicious harvest of Chef Clyde's Farm paired with a compatible combination of recreational activities. These High Mountain Harvest Weeks feature special sessions with Colorado's finest chefs, wine makers, and food artisans. Guests will have the chance to learn more about the foods of Colorado and how to prepare them at the outdoor Farm kitchen. Some of them include how to smoke a trout just caught in the nearby river, or how to preserve delicious Colorado peaches. All of these activities are in addition to the regular ranch activities. Some of the extra foodie activities will include cooking demos with local chefs, indulging in a wide variety of farm-to-table creations, all while sipping handcrafted Rocky Mountain cocktails and brews.

HARVEST WEEKS FOR 2016

Bikes & Brews - August 28-31

Whiskey & Fishing - August 31-September 4

Colorado High Mountain Harvest - September 4-11

refrigeration conveniently located near the gardens.

“Probably our best discovery has been implementing more “companion planting.” For example, if we plant just leafy greens in a bed we constantly are fighting bug infestation, but when radishes and onions are mixed in we seem to have healthier greens,” says Chef Clyde. We also companion plant root crops with top crops, i.e., carrots with kale as they don’t compete for the same space.

TEACHING AND SHARING



Photo: Jay O'Hare

The once-small garden has expanded to 4,000 square feet plus a large greenhouse for extended-season harvests.

A big part of Chef Clyde’s motivation in starting the garden was the benefits it could offer the community. The ranch is currently involved in several outreach programs to the community. A few of them are: selling any surplus produce to the local “on-line” co-operative; hosting the local charter school kids on field trips to the farm; senior citizen group tours, as well as agriculture alliances and master gardener classes.

As for the lucky guests enjoying a week’s vacation at Home Ranch, they can enjoy a range of activities and events revolving around the Tables to Farm garden (a twist on the term “farm to table”). Chef Clyde says, “Watching us prepare their meal outdoors with ingredients that they may have helped harvest is extremely educational and satisfying for them. We plan to offer more demonstrations and hands-on sessions of cooking, canning, preserving, bread-making at the Farm Kitchen.”

The harvest of the day often dictates the menu each day. “The cooks love to feature produce from the garden; as we verbalize our menus to the guests it elicits an excitement amongst them,” he says. Guests have the chance to dine within the gardens at the Farm Kitchen venue with wood-fired ovens and grills. Even the wood fuel is grown on the ranch. “Dining at sunset with live music adjacent to our horse meadow creates an unforgettable experience for our guests,” Chef Clyde adds.

Dining well has always been a part of the Home Ranch guest experience. This will never change. But now, with the addition of Chef Clyde’s Farm, vegetable garden and Farm Kitchen, both guests and the community benefit from the fruits of the land. “The credit,” says a modest Chef Clyde, “goes to the owners of the ranch, for their vision and ongoing commitment to the stewardship of the land and community of Clark and the Upper Elk River Valley.”


Find out more about the Home Ranch in Clark, Colorado at www.homeranch.com. 



Photo: Denise Jones

THE HOME RANCH WOOD-FIRED OVEN ROASTED FALL VEGETABLES

We love preparing this dish with our harvest from the gardens; hot roasting in our wood-fired ovens creates a smokiness and caramelization that turn Brussels sprouts haters into lovers. Our guests love seeing the simplicity and deliciousness of this dish. Serves 4.

Two quarts of mixed vegetables in bite size pieces: we use Brussels sprouts cut in half, cauliflower florets, butternut squash, rutabagas, turnips, parsnips, carrots, celery root, broccolini, etc.

½ cup grape seed oil

1 tablespoon fennel pollen (optional)

4 tablespoons fresh minced herbs, such as rosemary, thyme, sage, parsley

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1-2 tablespoons Spanish sherry vinegar or aged balsamic vinegar

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1. Toss vegetables in a mixing bowl with grape seed oil, fennel pollen, one half of the herbs, and salt and pepper.
2. Place on heating platter in one layer and roast, turning occasionally, at 400° for 15-20 minutes.
3. Remove from oven, toss vegetables with olive oil, vinegar and remaining herbs.
4. Serve hot or at room temperature.