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Food and drink

Easter, naturally

By Glenda Bartosh

Easter: time to celebrate all things "spring" and "renewal" as bits of life resurge around us after one mighty long, cold winter that, like a party guest wearing out her welcome, has finally and mercifully found her shoes and the door. Good riddance.

Depending on where you're at up and down the mountainsides to the sea, the wild woods are showing their spring barometers. The Indian plum is pushing out miniature green and white garlands, salmonberry bushes are showing tiny specks of green, and yellow cones of skunk cabbage are poking up their stinky heads.

Our gardens are also in spring mode, finally. My parsley, oregano, garlic chives and pot marjoram made it this year, but my rosemary bit the dust. On the positive side, the visual department more than makes up for the winter-kill as all that pent-up demand is delivering one outrageous outburst - tulips, daffies, the brilliant yellow Forsythia, even the pink of cherry blossoms are finally dotting the landscape of this late-arrival spring juxtaposed against an early Easter.

Soon it will be time for other green-growing, edible tips. Fiddleheads - so visually intriguing, but bitter. And asparagus, not yet up in Pemberton, so if you're going to have it with Easter dinner you'll be stuck with the stuff from California.

So what can you serve, naturally, for a dinner that will symbolize spring and keep palate and conscience happy? Thankfully, the Delta greenhouses have finally gotten enough sunlight to churn out some tasty local veggies, and while they may not be organic, at least you can be assured they can't use pesticides in greenhouses.

For one, look for Village Farms' mesh bags of tomatoes. I found mine at Save-On. Yes, Village Farms is a big outfit, but they do have greenhouses nearby in Delta - 110 acres of greenhouses, to be exact. When it comes to flavour, and who isn't wary of tomatoes this time of year, I'm munching one of their Mini Sensations tomatoes this instant and, dare I say, it's sensational. Almost as good as homegrown but, hey, those won't be around till August.

Here's another great find: Windset Farms' Fresco mini cucumbers, which come in a resealable plastic bag with air holes that you can wash and reuse - perfect for small greens you want to protect. Again, I found mine at Save-On-Foods, but look around for Windset's distinctive chartreuse and black label.

They're based in Abbotsford but they're also biggish in Delta, with 68 acres of greenhouses. As for the mini-cukes themselves, these things taste better than apples! Everybody who tries them gets hooked on their crispness and fresh flavour.

Add some locally grown greens - okay, so you didn't do a pot of mesclun on your windowsill this winter so the usual Earthbound Farms stuff will do - and some Pemberton potatoes, Lillooet carrots, down-home style hot cross buns from Sunflower Bakery and Café in Squamish, and Clapping Chimp's organic gala apples from the Similkameen that are still crisp and good (worth buying just for the graphic monkey on the bag) and you're on your way to assembling a pretty decent spring celebration.

If you're a meat eater, try to track down some non-medicated Fraser Valley-raised chicken, pork or lamb. One of your best bets is the Butcher on 10th in Vancouver, right on 10th Avenue near Sasamat.

The fun part - decorations and Easter eggs to hide for big kids and little ones alike - can also get funky and natural. Not that anyone wants to give up medicating with chocolate, but dyeing your own eggs is fun.

Look for fresh, local eggs. The trick to making good hard-boiled ones is not to boil them too hard or too hot or too long. If the water is bubbling too vigorously good chance the eggshells will crack. The older the eggs are, the easier it will be to peel them - old in this case means a few days in the fridge.

If you end up with a carton of super fresh eggs and have to use them right away, try adding a half teaspoon of baking soda to the water to make it a little more alkaline and your eggs will be easier to peel.

As for that greenish grey discoloration on the outside of the hard-boiled egg yolk, it will be kept to a minimum if you use fresh eggs, cook them as briefly as possible and cool them rapidly after cooking. The discoloration, by the way, is harmless.