

Good Food NEWS

Student Nutrition in Toronto: You've come a long way, baby...

One of my first assignments as a FoodShare intern was photographing "student nutrition volunteer appreciation luncheons." These events were held in school gyms or cafeterias around the City, and anywhere between 70 and 150 people of all ages and backgrounds were present, dining on catered lunches, and discussing the schools in their part of the City. The mood was cheerful, and Lori Nikkel, the coordinator of the events, commented, "It's great to see these people get appreciated by their peers." Even though I didn't really know who they were, I was happy enough to just snap away with my camera (and, of course, help myself to some of the catered goodies!). [ed. note: Martin's photos can be seen on the FoodShare website]

The people being honoured at the events were volunteers who, day in and day out, come into the schools and prepare lunches for students as part of Toronto's student nutrition programs.

Community-based student nutrition programs are vital to ensuring students eat safe, healthy meals, especially in marginalized communities or communities with specific dietary needs. Not only do these programs provide nutritious meals, they also help parents to cope with morning-time stress, provide educational venues, and help to build community. There is evidence that participants in these programs have lower rates of overweight and obesity, eat more fruits and veggies, and consume fewer fat calories than their counterparts.

Toronto boasts the most developed network of school based student nutrition programs in Canada with 421 programs feeding over 75,000 children citywide. 375 of these programs received funding from the City of Toronto in 2006. The province also funds the programs, although funding has dropped significantly in the last eight years. 50% or more of each student nutrition program's funding comes from parental contributions and community fundraising, which can vary significantly since each program is managed independently.

As impressive as this network is, almost every school relies on volunteers to keep the programs going. I was privileged to see these folks, at last, have a chance to sit down and enjoy a good meal that someone else had made for them.

Of course, for the programs to be effective, the food provided must be nutritious. Often enough, as I remember from my childhood, cafeteria trays are piled high with foods that are fatty, salty, and sugary, without much attention paid to fresh fruits and vegetables. Eating this sort of food is, without a doubt, better than not eating, but everyone would love to see Toronto's children eating fresh, well balanced meals as much as possible.

To this end, FoodShare runs a salad bar program that helps community members to advocate for this option, trains volunteers to run the bar, and sells produce to the schools at a competitive rate. More than a dozen Toronto schools now offer salad bars at least once a week. Some might be skeptical that kids would actually choose a healthier lunch if it were offered. In fact, the programs have met with huge success, largely due to students' increased ability to choose what and how much they want to eat.

Last week, I went to one of the Toronto schools to videotape the process and see for myself how the kids like the bar. It turns out they love it! I have never seen so many empty plates and smiling faces in a school cafeteria. Among the kids I interviewed, favorites included the Caesar salad, cheese squares and grapes. I guess kids like fresh, healthy food as much as the rest of us do.

If you are interested in more information about student nutrition in Toronto or starting a salad bar in your school, contact Lori Nikkel, community representative for the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition, at 416.392.1658. or lori@foodshare.net.

by Martin Brown

This week all boxes have local organic romaine lettuce, grown by Plan B Organic and harvested on Monday. Other local produce in both organic and conventional boxes: zucchini and garden peas (yum!!)

FIELD TO TABLE

a project of

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recipes

Lettuce & Tarragon Soup

yield: 4 servings.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/4 cup unsalted butter
- 2 leeks, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 head romaine lettuce - rinsed, dried, and chopped
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh French tarragon
- salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Place leeks and garlic in the pan and slowly cook and stir 10 minutes, or until tender and lightly browned. Mix in the chicken or vegetable broth and salt. Reduce heat and simmer approximately 15 minutes.

Increase heat to medium low and stir in the romaine lettuce. Cook 5 minutes. Stir in the tarragon. Remove from heat. In a blender, blend the soup until smooth. Return soup to the saucepan and warm over medium heat. Season with salt and pepper to taste.



featured this week: Romaine Lettuce

Romaine or Cos lettuce (often called simply Romaine or Cos) (*Lactuca sativa* L. var. *longifolia*) is a variety of lettuce which grows in a long head of sturdy leaves with a firm rib down the center. Unlike most lettuces, it is tolerant of heat.

Native to the eastern Mediterranean region and western Asia, lettuce has a long and distinguished history. With depictions appearing in ancient Egyptian tombs, the cultivation of lettuce is thought to date back to at least 4,500 BC. The ancient Greeks and Romans held lettuce in high regard both as a food and for its therapeutic medicinal properties. It apparently reached the West via Rome, as in Italian, it is called 'lattuga romana', and in French, 'laitue romaine', hence its other English name.

The thick ribs in the outer leaves should be removed as they have a milky fluid which can be bitter. Romaine lettuce is the standard lettuce used in Caesar salad. Due to its extremely low calorie content and high water volume, romaine lettuce - while often overlooked in the nutrition world - is actually a very nutritious food. Based on its nutrient density, it is an excellent source of vitamin A (in the form of beta-carotene), folic acid, vitamin C, potassium, manganese and chromium. Romaine lettuce is a very good source of dietary fiber.

Romaine and leaf lettuce should be washed and dried before storing in the refrigerator to remove their excess moisture. Place in a plastic bag or wrap in a damp cloth and store in the refrigerator crisper. Romaine lettuce will keep for five to seven days. All types of lettuce should be stored away from ethylene-producing fruits, such as apples, bananas and pears, since they will cause the lettuce leaves to brown.

Grilled BBQ Romaine Lettuce

yield: 6 servings.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1 1/2 tablespoons sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar (packed)
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 3 small heads romaine lettuce, halved lengthwise

DIRECTIONS:

In a blender or food processor mix soy sauce, sesame oil, vinegar, brown sugar, and ginger until thoroughly combined.

Brush lettuce with marinade. Place romaine lettuce cut-sides down, in center of cooking grate. Grill 5 to 7 minutes, turning and brushing with marinade halfway through grilling time.

Tip: Add crumbled blue cheese for extra flavor.

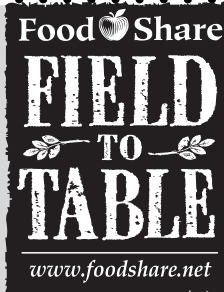
by any other name...

- romaine Kopfsalat - German
- lechuga del romaine - Spanish
- laitue de romaine - French
- lattuga di romaine - Italian
- alface do romaine - Portuguese
- romaine sla - Dutch

DELIVERIES

for the week of: July 11
orders are due 5 pm Tues. July 4

for the week of July 18
orders are due 5pm Tues. July 11



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