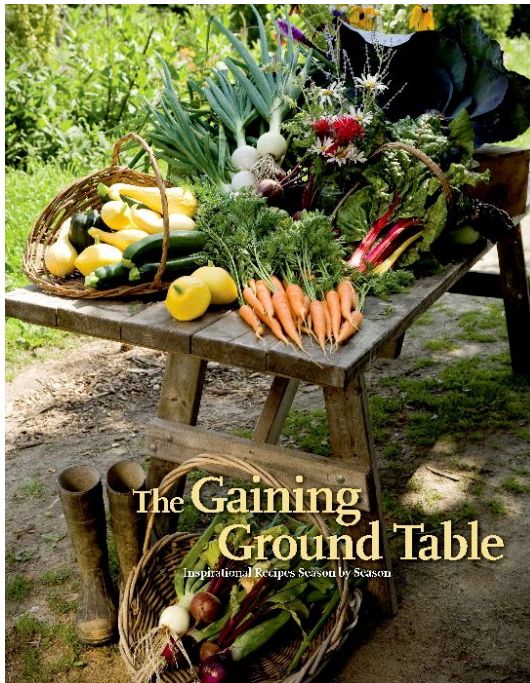


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## Gaining Ground book inspires cooks to use local produce

*by Nancy West*



Cookbook cover photo taken by Allie Cottrill.

Carlisle has had a close alliance with Gaining Ground in Concord for the past 15 years. Ever since the inception of the hunger relief organization, which grows organic produce and distributes it to deserving families, food pantries and other charities, Carlisle residents have figured prominently among its rosters of volunteers, benefactors and board members.

Last year, Gaining Ground's board and staff came up with the idea of producing a cookbook, *The Gaining Ground Table*, and several of Carlisle's talented cooks grabbed the opportunity to lend their culinary expertise.

As Valerie Kolligian Thayer of Concord, who co-chaired the project, said, "This cookbook is special because it supports the very important work that Gaining Ground does – supporting hunger relief on a local level. And we want to inspire the broader community to use locally grown foods in season, and to prepare them

using recipes that are accessible to all, from beginning to experienced cooks."

Thayer's comments point to a challenge the recipients of Gaining Ground's bounty have faced in the past. While most hunger relief organizations provide nonperishable items in the form of canned or boxed goods, Gaining Ground contributes fresh produce grown on its nine-acre Concord farm. Under the supervision of a small paid staff, the planting, cultivating, harvesting and distribution represents the efforts of hundreds of volunteers from Concord, Carlisle and the surrounding towns. But like many of us, the recipients are not always familiar with ingredients like kale, beet greens, squash and collards, and may not know exactly what to do with the ingredients. This newly published 244-page book, with a colorful cover photo by professional photographer and Carlisle resident Allie Cottrill of Great Brook Path, seeks to answer those questions.

Many of the more than 300 recipes included in the collection are targeted specifically to children's appetites. In addition to highlighting wide-ranging local produce, the book also includes recipes that use fish, meat, eggs, cheese and milk.

Carlisle native Heidi Haring of West Street welcomed the invitation to serve as a recipe tester, though she admitted that at one point during the months of testing, her three daughters asked her to start making “kid food” again. Haring contributed several recipes of her own, some that were old family favorites and others that she developed specifically for this project.

And when Haring was not testing a recipe, her friend Timm Brandhorst of Russell Street usually was. “I probably tested 25 recipes, all of them tasty, and most of them my family really liked!” Brandhorst said. “We all get into ruts with cooking, and this process helped me get out of one. Since receiving the cookbook, I’ve been using it regularly, and my whole family is enjoying the dishes I’m preparing.”

A professional nutrition consultant as well as a Gaining Ground volunteer, Francine Royce was particularly committed to the idea of disseminating information on how to capitalize on the farm’s healthful ingredients. “For years, so many of us involved with Gaining Ground, whether as volunteers, recipients, staff or friends of the organization, have exchanged recipes and ideas about cooking,” said Francine Royce of Elizabeth Ridge. “A cookbook is a way to share these many ideas with a wider community and to encourage others to eat locally, using produce when it is in season, which is when it is of the highest quality, tastes the best, and is most nutritious.”

The cookbook costs \$20 and is available at Carlisle’s Farmers Market and at Concord businesses, including the Concord Visitor Center, Spero Home, Farfalle Italian Market, Debra’s Natural Gourmet in West Concord. For more information, go to Gaining Ground’s website: [www.gainingground.org](http://www.gainingground.org). Δ

## Butternut Squash Risotto

1 butternut squash (2 ½ pounds)  
1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
1 1/2 tsp light brown sugar  
4 cups chicken broth  
3 Tbsp unsalted butter  
1 small onion or 1 large shallot, minced  
1 ½ cups Arborio rice  
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese  
1 ½ Tbsp finely chopped fresh sage  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Peel and seed the butternut squash. Cube squash into ½ inch pieces. You should have approximately 5 cups. Place squash on a sheet pan with olive oil, brown sugar and a sprinkling of kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Roast squash for approximately 20 minutes or until tender. Remove squash from the oven and set aside.

In a medium saucepan, warm the chicken broth over medium heat. Turn heat to low. Do not allow broth to boil.

In a large, heavy saucepan (preferable with a rounded bottom), melt 2 tablespoons of the butter. Add the onion and cook until opaque. Add rice to saucepan and stir to coat with the butter. Add a ladle of the warm chicken broth (approximately ½ cup) to the rice and stir constantly until the broth is almost completely absorbed. Continue adding the broth, one ladle at a time until all the broth is used up and the risotto has a creamy consistency. It is important to continuously stir the risotto and to wait until most of the broth is absorbed by the rice before adding additional liquid. The entire process should take approximately 20 minutes.

Turn off the heat. Stir in roasted butternut squash, Parmesan cheese, the remaining tablespoon

of butter and sage. Season with additional salt and pepper to taste.

Serves 4-6.

*Contributed by Valerie Kolligian Thayer*

## Deep Dark Chocolate Zucchini Cupcakes

These dense, dark, intensely chocolate cupcakes are the perfect way to use up extra zucchini from your garden or the farmers market. Frosting is optional but a dusting of confectioner's sugar just before serving looks lovely. These cupcakes are even better the next day and are a wonderful not-too-sweet treat with an afternoon cup of tea.

1 1/2 cups brown sugar  
1/4 cup melted butter  
3/4 cup vegetable oil  
3 large eggs  
2 teaspoons vanilla  
1/2 cup buttermilk  
2 cups grated zucchini  
1 cup dark chocolate chips (such as Ghirardelli 60% cacao)  
2 cups whole wheat pastry flour (or unbleached white flour)  
1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted  
1/2 tsp sea salt  
2 tsp baking soda

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease muffin pans and line with paper muffin cups.

In a medium bowl mix together the sugar, butter, and oil. Beat in the eggs, one at a time until well incorporated. Stir in vanilla, buttermilk, zucchini and chocolate chips.

In a separate bowl, whisk together all of the dry ingredients. Add the liquid ingredients and mix until well combined. Spoon batter into muffin pans. Bake in the center of the oven for about 20 minutes or until just done, being careful not to over bake.

Yields approximately 20 cupcakes.

*Contributed by Francine Royce*