

# Event provides fresh perspective

The second annual Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel Restaurant Week adds eateries and culinary farm experiences. It's Friday through Oct. 20.

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While dew droplets still weighed on the grass blades at the farm down a Bokeelia dirt road, Rocky the black rooster crowed. Yes, it was early.

Golden yellow Americana chickens clucked, cooed and laid pastel blue-green eggs in their coop. Armed with her sunglasses and a travel mug of coffee, Christine Lindsey started her tour near the lychee trees.

She's the Sprout Queen. She will also be our guide.

"We like to provide taste, texture and color when you have a salad on your plate, so you don't just have green or iceberg yellow," Lindsey said as she tore a leaf from a spicy hybrid similar to purple Osaka mustard greens. Just one sample bite was so spicy, it made the heart race.

Lindsey and Michael Wallace, the farmer at Pine Island Botanicals, are new culinary-experience hosts for the second annual Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel Restaurant Week, which runs Friday through Oct. 20. A Thursday dinner at Twisted Vine in

downtown Fort Myers kicks off the event.

This Sunday, they'll lead a tour of their 4-acre residential farm while discussing the natural and sustainable way they grow their hydroponic greens, sprouts, ground gardens and fruit tree groves. The tour ends with a raw food demonstration from chef Johan Everstijn of The Cider Press Cafe, opening soon in Naples.

Guests will dine on a four-course menu of local, raw ingredients in dishes from cuisines as far as Cambodia and Thailand. They'll sip lemongrass-basil limeade and nibble on spicy cashew zucchini rolls and curried sprouted lentil salad.

Elsewhere, expect wine tastings paired with live music, more exclusive cooking demonstrations, more tours and classes. Last year's list of 24 participating restaurants rose to 31 this year, many offering a limited-time, prix-fixe menu.

To participate, chefs are required to look to area farms and waters to fill their plates.

"It's a matter of helping our community and finding food that's fresher, not frozen," said Shohreh Durkin, food and beverage manager for the historic 1926 Tarpon

## GULF GROUPEL CHIMICHURRI

6-8 servings

- 6-8 locally caught grouper fillets, 8 ounces each
- 8 cloves of garlic
- 1 teaspoon coarse sea salt
- 1 teaspoon dry oregano
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- ½ cup lemon juice
- Zest of 2 lemons
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 bunch fresh Italian parsley

» **Chop garlic and parsley** and mix all ingredients to make chimichurri sauce. Allow the sauce to marinate for 30 minutes before serving.

» **Lightly season fresh Gulf grouper** fillets with sea salt, white and black pepper and paprika. Broil at 450 F until grouper is opaque white in the center, about 8-10 minutes.

» **Finish fillets with a generous amount** of chimichurri and serve. Note: Freshness of all ingredients is key.

Source: Matanzas on the Bay on Fort Myers Beach

Lodge & Restaurant on Pine Island, which uses Wallace's greens as much as possible.

"It's a higher cost, but it's the stuff you'd like to eat yourself. Bigger suppliers are becoming aware of it."

Every Restaurant Week menu will have locally sourced ingredients, whether it's red Gulf grouper for the chimichurri dish at Matanzas on the Bay or Immokalee

tomatoes smoked for the cream sauce in Il Cielo's potato gnocchi.

"We were a little stricter with locally sourced (menus) this year," said Nancy MacPhee, program manager for product development at the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, the Restaurant Week organizer. "Last year, we found we were the biggest hero to the small farmer,

raising awareness and generating business for farmers." So they added more farm tours.

The Pine Island Botanicals tour is one of the 12 culinary experiences, compared to the seven offered the inaugural year.

At the farm, Lindsey me-

andered to farmer Wallace, crouching while he harvested sunshine-yellow squash blossoms bigger than his outstretched hand.

"We just want the public to become more aware of what's available, the unique products that are out there that you normally don't see in the

grocery store," Wallace said before diving into the squash plants once again.

Also new: Hotels are offering discounts. And this is the first time the event has partnered with Florida Gulf Coast University's hospitality program.

All this deliciousness be-

gins with a Restaurant Week Kickoff Dinner Thursday at Twisted Vine in downtown Fort Myers, featuring chef Brandon McGlamery of Winter Park. A recent James Beard nominee and Best Chef South semifinalist, he has won acclaim at his Luma on Park and Prato restaurants.

"This is a place of pride," said McGlamery, who grew up in Naples and St. Petersburg. "There are resources all around us besides white sandy beaches and mangroves."

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Restaurant Week featured chef Brandon McGlamery discusses some greens with Denise Muir, owner and operator of Rabbit Run, a hydroponic farm that uses organic pest control methods and specializes in heirloom vegetables, strawberries and tropical fruits. SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

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» Watch the video and check out the photo gallery of the culinary tour preview we took at Pine Island Botanicals and the Sprout Queen headquarters.

» Also, look for mini-reviews of all the participating restaurants during Restaurant Week Oct. 11-20.



Chris "The Sprout Queen" Lindsey in the hydroponic greenhouse at Pine Island Botanicals, a farm on Pine Island. SARAH COWARD/THE NEWS-PRESS



A sunflower sprout ready to slough off its seed at Pine Island Botanicals, a 4-acre residential farm on Pine Island. SARAH COWARD/THE NEWS-PRESS



Morning dew clings to wheat grass at Pine Island Botanicals, a 4-acre residential farm on Pine Island. SARAH COWARD/THE NEWS-PRESS