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PRODUCE NOTES

March 15, 2004

SPRING ONIONS: ONCE A YEAR FLAVOR

BABY BEETS WITH SPRING ONIONS

6 medium spring onions
12-16 baby beets with greens
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon walnut oil
1-tablespoon olive oil
3 sprigs fresh thyme
2-4 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons crumbled blue cheese
Salt and peper

Preheat oven to 400° F

Whisk together vinegar and oils, and set aside.

Prepare beets by removing greens, discarding the stems. Wash greens and set aside. Scrub beets and place in roasting pan. Coat with the olive oil and thyme, season with salt & pepper. Add enough water to cover the bottom. Cover tightly, bake for 20 minutes. Remove cover and cook until tender when pierced with a knife, about 10-15 minutes.

Slice onions in quarters lengthwise. In large sauté pan melt butter, add onions and sauté for 5-7 minutes. Reduce heat and continue cooking about 5 minutes until the onions are caramelized. Transfer to bowl, set aside.

Using the same pan sauté the washed beet greens until just wilted, about 2 minutes.

Transfer immediately to serving plate. Place onions over the greens. Trim tails off beets, and slice the larger ones. Arrange over onions and greens. Drizzle vinaigrette over beets and greens. Sprinkle with blue cheese. Serve immediately.
Serves 4.

Do you ever wish there was more onion to a scallion? Spring onions, the immature bulb of onions, are in good supply right now, heralding the end of winter's storage crop and the beginning of spring. Larger than green onions or scallions, spring onions have all the clean, fresh flavor of a green onion only more of it, making them extremely versatile in the kitchen. Use the bulb and greens separately or together to liven up simple winter fare or to accent the liveliness of the season's first baby beets, new potatoes, or asparagus.

Strictly speaking, spring onions are slightly different than green onions as they are truly bulb onions, *Allium cepa*, and green onions are usually related to the oriental bunching onion, *Allium fistulosum*, or a cross of the two species. A look at the green tells you the difference. A *cepa* species will have a round, but slightly dented C-shaped leaf, while the *fistulosum* will have a perfectly round, hollow green. All come in red, white, and yellow bulb colors.

Native to Central Asia, onions have been cultivated for over 5,000 years. Ancient Egyptians ate lots of raw onions but the upper class avoided them. Their priests were forbidden from eating them, as are the Brahmans and Jains of India today as they're said to foster excessive emotional desire and interfere with the spiritual path.

But they are so good for you! Like the other *Allium* species: garlic, leeks, shallots and chives, onions are rich in sulfur. Western medicine recognizes food sources of sulfur as anticancer agents. Chinese medicine regards sulfur as a blood purifier that helps remove parasites and heavy metals, and which also aids in the metabolism of protein. With their protective sulfur compounds, all onions are good for you. Spring onions may be best of all because their greens add four times the vitamin C and 5,000 times the vitamin A of bulb onions.

To keep spring onions fresh, consumers should refrigerate them unwashed in plastic bags for up to five days.

Serving suggestions: Try chopped spring onions in egg fried rice, marinated beets, chef's salad, egg or tuna salad.

GRILLED SPRING ONIONS & ASPARAGUS

4 spring onions
12-16 asparagus spears
4 limes, cut into wedges
Olive oil
Coarse sea salt

If the onions are large slice them lengthwise in half. If not, leave them whole. Brush with olive oil and grill or broil until browned. Serve with wedges of lime. Serves 4.

