

# Quacking From Rappahannock

March 2011

## Reserve Your Date for A Whole Lamb Roast Feast

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## Upcoming Classes & Workshops

- March: Sunday March 6, 3-7 PM– Cooking Class: 4-course seasonal menu. [Un Dimanche a La Campagne/ Sunday in the Country, March](#) - Washington, VA
- April: Sunday April 3, 3:30-7:30 PM - Cooking Class: 4-course seasonal menu. [Un Dimanche A La Campagne/ Sunday in the Country, April](#), Washington, VA
- Week-end of April 8, Spring Wellness Retreat at [Belle Meade](#) Farm & B&B in the F.T. Valley of Rappahannock County (Sperryville). Organized by Cheryl Mirabella of [Living Whole Health](#). Yoga, hiking, rest, relaxation, herbal instruction & culinary instruction (the latter by me). Register at [LivingWholeHealth.com](#).
- Later: Check our workshop page on the [website](#) for additional cooking classes and canning & jam making workshops

## Spring Party Time: Roast A Lamb!

Roasting a whole lamb in the spring is the epitome of the outdoor party (although a whole pig comes pretty close too). And we love to do it for customers.

The lamb is sourced from small local producers such as:

- [Rappahannock Farms](#), a "consortium" of eight Rappahannock farms breeding and raising Certified Humane [Clun Forest](#) lambs that produce a fabulous tasting meat on pasture alone – no processed feeds, growth hormones, or antibiotics. They practice rotational grazing to provide better health for the sheep, pastures and environment and their livestock is fenced out of streams and wetlands. Other products available include wool, fleece as well as chicken and eggs.
- Two Spruce Farm in Berryville, VA where Doug & Lois Aylestock (who also own & operate butcher-shop & custom slaughter house [Blue Ridge Meat of Front Royal](#)) raise [Romney lambs](#)— a mild sweet tasting breed. They raise the animals from birth in a close 60 head flock, on natural grass, supplemented by grains (if the pastured are under snow) and alfalfa hay grown and raised by Doug and his friend, Michael Flagg.
- [Mount Vernon Farm](#) in Sperryville, VA raises a cross between Katahdin,



Dorset, and Cheviot all on pastures shared with cows on an intense rotational grazing system in fenced meadows to protect the steams that run through the 830 acre farm— 230 acres of which is in pasture. Owner Cliff Miller & farm Manager Mike Peterson do not **use any supplement that's contrary to the animal digestive system**, no chemical wormers, no antibiotics and pay great attention to the health of their soil. Other products available from Mount Vernon are pastured pork & beef, eggs, & luscious blackberries (in season).



- Second Wind Farm also in Sperryville VA raises [Romney lambs](#) for meat and Cormo lamb for their gorgeous fleece. [Dennis & Barbara King](#) also raise Nubian goats for milk, chicken, eggs and sell fleece & yarns.

As lamb start to repopulate the hills of Rappahannock county and people realize what a wonderful **meat it is, we'll have even more** farms to choose from. And indeed, we can use your own lamb if you raise them— **as we've** done for several clients.

The lamb must be ordered as soon as possible mostly because time needs to be scheduled at the processor for slaughtering & hanging the carcass (it should hang for no less than 3 full days, **4's better**). **Slaughterhouses that** are within reasonable distance and that are small enough to be willing to handle just one lamb, are very few, and therefore busy. So if you are interested in a doing a lamb roast, the sooner you order and schedule the better (months ahead is not too much!). A deposit is generally required, and you should expect to pay \$250 to \$400 for the lamb, depending on the farm, the breed and the animal hanging **weight (from low 30's up to 60 lb)**.

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At Laughing Duck have developed a system to roast a lamb or a pig above ground that does not damage the lawn (not to mention that we do NOT want any burnt grass flavor on the meat) yet allows for the outside cooking experience that let guests gather around the fire to watch the process if they are interested. It involves cardboard, insulated bubble wrap

and cinder blocks. The "pit" is assembled the day before, and disassembled the day after. Grass watered, and voila, nobody can tell a lamb was roasted there. It can be done just about anywhere - provided we have electricity for the electric rotisserie spit — and a 10x10 ft flat area.

The rule of thumb for cooking lamb on an open rotisserie is 1 hour for 10 pound of animal— somewhat shorter when the rotisserie is covered with metal sheeting to reflect the heat down. A 36 pound lamb can be done in as little as 3 hours!

Over three hours, the trick is to monitor the fire so it radiates even heat, move the charcoal around when needed to provide more heat on the thicker areas and less on the thinner parts, and occasionally baste with lemon juice (lots & lots of lemon juice). **It's important to keep the fire indirect and to avoid flaring.** We use drip pans to collect the fat and a re-purposed long han-



dle garden hoe to move the charcoal around. **(it's all very sophisticated, isn't it?)**

Once the lamb is removed to the cutting area under the tent, Keith proceeds to cut it up. This is often when guests start to come over with a glass of wine to ask questions. We are happy to chat and answer questions. When we cut, we try the different parts together: the legs together, the shoulders on another platter, the tenderloins **together, and "every thing else" on yet another platter.** It gives everybody a chance to sample different cuts of the animal to compare flavors and textures. As the bricks radiate heat for several hours, we can keep platters warm (covered with foil) by the pit until they are needed at the table.

I like to serve the lamb with a green sauce made of cilantro (lots! as it is growing rampant in the garden in the spring), a few different mints, spring onions, shallot, a little garlic, a pinch of cumin & a dash of cayenne, lemon juice, a big splash of rice vinegar and a

little olive oil. It makes a beautiful bright green sauce with a pungent zest that goes well with rich-tasting roasted lamb. I call it Four Herb Mongolian sauce. But there are lots of options **if you don't care for cilantro.**

The rest of the menu is based on other seasonal produce. With the

lamb as the star, I suggest easy-going flavorful side dishes such as:

- Greens are growing exuberantly again, so all kinds of glorious green salads can be tossed together using arugula, green & red lettuces, frilly or spotted lettuce, frisée, mache, baby mustard, tiny beet leaves, sorrel, young endives, sweet herbs, pea shoots, and edible flowers (purple viola, orange calendula, yellow brassicas, cowslip etc)
- Asparagus, grilled or roasted need nothing other than a little olive oil to really shine. Comes June the first zucchinis raised under cover are ready, and at this point they **are tender & delicate... and** nobody is tired of them yet. Grilled and served with a rosemary vinaigrette, they are a nice complement to the lamb. Other seasonal veggies can include: Swiss chard,

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young turnips or beets.

- A rice pilaf or a grain salad, whether couscous or wheat berries, always work. Ingredients are infinitely varied: chick peas, dry fruit, crunchy radishes, sundry tomatoes, wilted Swiss chard, or later in the spring the first of the cherry tomatoes. Or: roasted potato salad with purslane (and a little bacon maybe)?

**Dessert? It's better to keep it simple** with things such as Rhubarb ice-cream & strawberry tart, or brownies & vanilla bean ice-cream. Or just big bowls of strawberries, bowls of cream & butter cookies.

We often throw a few chicken on the grill or in the smokers for those who do not eat lamb. (Plenty of delicious pastured chicken is raised in Rappahannock County!) - as well as provide vegetarians alternatives.

Oh! And we (of course!) clean-up take away trash & ashes, the lamb carcass (unless you want to make lots and lots of lamb broth). We can also provide vintage china plates & silverware for 75.

So... So interested in a "[Mé-chou](#)" but don't want to do the cooking yourself? Call 540-675-3725 or e-mail [Sylvie](#) to discuss possibilities.

## The Kitchen Garden: Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme

Herbs are favorites of both the cook and the gardener. In the kitchen, herbs are versatile and can be used in salads, grilled food, roast, sautéed dishes etc bringing sometimes extraordinary flavor and visual appeal to a dish while adding hardly any calories—a great boon for anybody watching their diet.

Quite a few favorite culinary herbs can easily be raised from seeds. As plants, they generally prefer full sun in good soil and often make attractive additions to the garden. Start the seeds indoors (under grow lights or shop lights), in the greenhouse or in a cold frame, using a good quality seed-starting medium Fertilize lightly and regularly once the seedlings have a couple of true leaves.

A few perennial favorites easily started from seeds include:

- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) - There exist many thyme varieties, each with a slightly different flavor, all suitable for cooking: German or winter thyme, French or summer thyme, English thyme, lemon thyme (*T. citriodorus*), oregano thyme, caraway thyme (*T. herbarona*)... **Only seeds of *T. vulgaris* are easily available.** Propagate other species by stem rooting. If you are at an herb shop, close your eyes, gently brush the thyme plants and breath in the different fragrances. It can be planted as a specimen plant in the herb garden, but also

makes a fine edging in any sunny border. Bees love thyme flowers. Creeping thyme (*T. serpyllum*) is good as a mat-forming ground cover for sunny area. Although suitable for **cooking, it's a little harder to harvest** nice sprigs from it because of its creeping habit - but it also comes in different scents. Sow thyme indoor in late winter or early spring in flats on the surface of the soil as it germinates better if the seeds are not covered; a little grit does wonder. Provide plenty of light and ventilation. **Move to the garden when it's generally above freezing or to a cold frame as soon as the plants are 1 or 2" inch tall.** They may not bulk significantly until the second year: start a lot so you can harvest enough for cooking the first year. Thyme dries easily for use in the winter: just lay your sprigs on a tray in the counter until dry - which only takes a few days in winter or fall. In mild-winter years, **it's possible to harvest moderately from healthy plants throughout the winter (but don't count on it).**

- Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) - Chives is one of the earliest herbs to reappear in the spring. I have harvested it **as early as March in "good"** years. Both leaves and the young pink flowers (which ap-

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pear in the spring) are edible. They are great in potato salad and to sprinkle on top of many dishes. Sow in clumps; seeds germinate in 2 to 3 weeks, in moist, warm soil. Cover the seeds as they need darkness to germinate. Plant the seedling in full sun! If you cut the flowers as soon as they are **fully open, you'll encourage** more blooming - an advantage for summer salad where you want some rosy pungency.

- Garlic Chives (*Allium tuberosum*) are also called Chinese chives. The leaves are flatter and have a much stronger (onion-er) flavor than chives. The white flowers are also edible (use sparingly raw and more generously cooked). The plant blooms in late summer and is not out of place in a flower border, but be sure to deadhead fanatically (or use the flowers in arrangements) - **in other words, don't let the flowers go to seed** or you may end up with a lot more garlic chive than you ever want. Should that happen, pull the whole bulb, trim off the roots, and stir fry the whole plant (white and green parts) in Chinese-style stir-fries.
- Sage (*Salvia officinalis*). Sage is very attractive plant that need not be contained to the herb garden, thanks to its wonderful blue-gray foliage and blue-purple flowers in mid to late spring. Fresh sage is a world away from store-bought **dry sage. It's wonderful cut in fine ribbons and sautéed in olive oil (with garlic) to flavor**

**a pot of white beans and it's** great in all kinds of stuffing and pork dishes. Fried sage leaves are an exciting and unusual appetizer that goes very well with a chilled glass of pinot grigio. Sage is a short live perennial for me, so I start new plants every other year.

**Annuals that you'll have to start** from seeds every year include:

- Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) – There are many kinds of basil: large leaves (sweet basil, Genoese basil), tiny leaves (Greek basil), ruffled, purple, lemon, cinnamon, holy, Thai basil etc. I prefer the large leaf types for pesto, but they can all be used successfully in salad, with tomatoes, finely shredded and tossed with pasta, to flavor mayonnaise **etc. It's better to use basil** fresh, although I also make pesto (without cheese), freezing it in ice-cube containers for soups and pasta in the winter. The biggest failure with basil is to start the seed (or transplant **out**) **when it's still too cold for it.** Basil is a tropical plant that likes **it hot, so don't sow (and don't** plant) until the weather is reliably warm. I start basil seeds in individual small pots over a heat pad, and gradually acclimate the plant to the outside when the nights stay above 50°F. During the growing season, pinch off the blooms and harvest the tips (not single leaves) to encourage branching, i.e. the production of side branches with more leaves, which is what you want. At the end of the season, you may let basil go to seed; shake the dried out plant over the beds where

you want basil to come back and you may be in luck: lemon basil reseed itself well for me.

- Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) – although a biennial (meaning that it will bloom the 2nd year and then die after it produced its seeds), from a culinary prospective, treat parsley as an annual and sow every year: as soon as the plant start going to bloom, its energy goes to producing flowers and seeds and it stops producing usable leaves. It loves rich moist soil and unlike many other herbs, will tolerate some shade. It comes in two kind: flat leaves and curly; the flavor is somewhat different, but similar (although some curly parsley seems to be lacking in **"parsley" flavor**). **Because parsley** has a taproot (i.e one long root, like a carrot), transplanting can be difficult if you wait too long, so be very careful, or transplant very young. Alternatively, sow directly outdoors in **spring. (I don't like the latter,** but it may work for you)

Good seed sources with which I am familiar include (They also have a lot more than just herb seeds!):

- [Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds](#)
- [Johnny's Seeds](#)
- [Nichols Garden Nursery](#)
- [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#)
- [Territorial Seed Company](#)
- Franchi Seeds from [Seeds of Italy](#).

## The Cook & the Gardener: Kale and White Bean Soup



*I do like soups. Versatile, lending themselves to being made in advance, as sophisticated or as simple as you want, and nutritious, soups are part of my fall and winter repertory. And early spring too*

### Ingredients:

- A bunch of curly kale
- 2 Italian sausage (hot or mild as you like)
- 1 can of white beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth (preferably home-made) + water as needed
- 2 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, finely diced
- A few fennel seeds (optional)

Serves: 4 to 6 as appetizer; 2 as hearty meal.

### Instructions:

Wash the kale. Bunch together and, using a large knife, shred coarsely.

Slice sausages in 1/4 inch slices.

In soup pot, heat up the olive oil, add and sauté the sausage slices until browned on both sides, then add the garlic and fennel seeds (if using) and stir until garlic is fragrant, 30 seconds or so. Add the white beans & broth. Bring to boil. Add the kale, and bring to boil again. Add water as necessary depending how thick/ thin you like your soup. Lower heat and simmer covered 20 to 30 minutes or until kale is tender. Salt & pepper to taste.

Serve with some good crusty bread. Excellent for **lunch on a cold day after you've been working outside** spreading mulch or turning the compost pile. (Note: does reheat very nicely, so you can make the night before...)

## The Cook and the Gardener: Pink Grapefruit & Rosemary Sorbet

*This is a difficult time of the year for fruit: citrus season is almost over - yet berries and juicy sun-ripened peaches are months away. I yearn for refreshing, fruity desserts low in fats but high in flavor. So I combine Ruby Red grapefruit and herbs that are still (already?) growing in the winter garden to make this pale translucent pink sorbet. Easy to make, it is elegant and slightly unusual - a perfect ending to a rich meal. The inspiration is from the Inn at Little Washington in Washington, VA where, years ago, I had a yellow grapefruit and basil sorbet served between courses. The recipe work with other herbs such as lemon thyme, lemon verbena...*

### Ingredients

- 2 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> cup freshly squeezed ruby red grapefruit juice
- 1+ cup simple syrup flavored with rosemary
- 1 tbs unflavored vodka (optional but will help the

sorbet not freeze too hard)

Mix well and refrigerate until cool. Process in ice cream maker according to directions, before freezing.

If you do not have an ice-cream-maker, pour into a flat pan, and freeze, stirring vigorously with a fork every 30 or 60 minutes with a fork. When there is no liquid left, process into food processor until smooth and serve ASAP.

### Simple Rosemary Syrup:

Bring to boil 1 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> cup water with 1 cup sugar. Add a large sprig of rosemary (how large depends on how assertive you want the flavor to be). Boil for 30 seconds. Remove from heat. Let cool completely before using, discard the sprig of rosemary.

## Seasonal Menu Ideas

Follow the hyperlinks for recipes, from my blog's archives

### Two Course

#### Vegetarian

Wheat Berry Salad with Chickpeas, Wilted Swiss Chard, Sundry Tomatoes & Dried Apricots

[Maple Vanilla Baked Custard](#)

#### Omnivore

[End of Winter Salad with Duck Breast & Potatoes in Duck Fat](#)

Baked Apples with Honey & [Cornmeal Cranberry Lemon Thyme Cookies](#)

### Three Course

#### Vegetarian

Winter Green Salad with Toasted Pumpkins Seeds  
[Roasted Cauliflower with Ginger & Garlic Dressing](#)

Quinoa with Lentils  
Apple & Cranberry Cake

#### Omnivore

[Leeks & Suncoke Soup](#)

Chicken Fricassée  
Lemon Rice & Parsleyed Carrots  
Mini-Pavlovas

### Four Course

#### Vegetarian

Beet, Walnut & Mache Salad  
[Sorrel Vichyssoise](#) (use a vegetarian broth or water)  
Sage, Butternut & Mushroom Lasagna  
Upside Down Pear Tart with [Ginger Ice Cream](#)

#### Omnivore

Cumin Scented Carrot Soup  
Arugula Salad with Pears & Blue Cheese  
[True Coq au Vin](#)  
Chocolate Mousse with [Brittany Butter Cookies](#)

### Five Course

#### Vegetarian

Mushroom & Spinach Soup  
Winter Green Salad With Maple Balsamic Vinaigrette  
Roasted Acorn Squash Boat with Orange Braised Red Onion & Feta  
Cheese & Fruit Platter  
Roasted Banana Split Sundae

#### Omnivore

[Pork Rillettes](#) with [Pickles Sunroots](#)  
Field Salad with Toasted Pecans  
[Red Cooked Beef With Sweet Potatoes](#)  
Cheese Platter with Fruit & Preserves  
Vanilla Bean Ice-Cream With Sautéed Pears



Crepes with Almond Cream  
& Caramelized Maple Apples

### Brunch Ideas

- Sundry Tomato & Spinach Strata
- Ham & Gruyere Quiche
- Buttermilk Parmesan Biscuit with Virginia Ham
- Dried Cherry Scones
- Apple & Pecan Cake
- [Crepes with Almond Cream & Caramelized Maple Apples](#)
- [Super Easy Smoothies](#)

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# Laughing Duck Gardens & Cookery

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## Special Event & Week-end Cookery:

- In-home catering for a special dinner, brunch or lunch, high tea, **hors d'oeuvres and more.**
- In-home catering for small weddings (up to 75 guests), wedding rehearsals, anniversaries, engagement, birthdays, showers etc at your home or your vacation rental home.
- Week-end/vacation cookery packages that let you fully enjoy activities in the country and come home to incredible cooked-from-scratch meals, with many locally sourced ingredients.

## Personal Chef Services For Every Day Cookery

- Personal Chef Services perfect for busy families, singles or couples: the chef plans, shops, cooks and packages for your freezer meals tailored to your preferences and diet. Available as one-time service or as a subscription.
- A La Carte cookery services (hourly) also available.

## Cooking Instruction

- Workshops throughout the year show you that cooking can be fun, unfussy and rewarding - and a money saver. Topics are varied: from soup making to canning, from ice-cream making to roasting duck, from spice appreciation to cooking a feast, there is **something for everybody!** The newest series of classes "Un Dimanche A La Campagne/ Sunday in the Country" shows how to prepare a seasonal ever changing 4-course menu
- Canning & jam making workshops in summer & fall
- Personal/private cookery lessons for a very focused one-on-one session or for a group of friends. They make a great birthday present.

**Kitchen Garden & Cookery Talks:** Sylvie is available for speaking to your group about food gardening or cooking. Or for demonstrations

## Gift certificates

**Writing:** Sylvie shares her experience about growing food and cooking locally and from the garden in her blog "[Rappahannock Cook & Kitchen Gardener](#)".

**Kitchen Garden Coach:** Coaching Services are perfect for somebody who is willing to do the work but need guidance or advice, whether once, occasionally or on a regular basis. Whether your questions have to do with growing, harvesting or cooking, Sylvie can help.



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