



FOOD/CULINARY

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WALLA WALLA – THE BREADBASKET OF THE NORTHWEST – SERVES UP AN ABUNDANCE OF LOCAL PRODUCE AND GOURMET EATS

(WALLA WALLA, Wash.)—While Walla Walla may be world renowned for its wine production, the culinary side of the Walla Walla Valley has in recent years gained national recognition for the quality and variety of its cuisine.

Walla Walla's long-standing love affair with cultivating food began more than a century ago on the island of Corsica off the west coast of Italy. It was there that a French soldier carried some sweet onion seeds in his pocket and brought them to the Walla Walla Valley. Over decades, the Walla Walla Sweet Onion was developed through a process of hand selecting onions from each year's harvest for exceptional sweetness, size and shape.

Under a federal marketing order established in 1995, Walla Walla Sweets can be grown only within the Walla Walla Valley. Anyone outside that area can grow Walla Walla Sweets, but they may not market the name. The high water and sugar contents that make Walla Walla Sweets so sweet and mild also mean they do not store as well as traditional onions. So eat them when they're ready, which is mid-June through September. But Walla Walla has plenty more to offer than just its iconic onion.

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Most agricultural areas in Walla Walla remain devoted to wheat. The region is one of the top wheat producers in the state, which is why Walla Walla is often referred to as “The Breadbasket of the Pacific Northwest.”

World-class vineyards and wineries also abound here. And typically where fine wine thrives, so do gourmet eats as evidenced by Walla Walla’s recent recognition by The Daily Meal as “America’s Best Small Town for Food” and one of three finalists for America’s Best Food Town in the inaugural Sunset Travel Awards. Visitors can savor the “localvore” lifestyle by sampling goat cheese at Monteillet Fromagerie, handmade chocolates at Bright’s Candies, and homegrown asparagus, spinach, potatoes, green peas, string and lima beans, corn, cherries, and strawberries from local farmers markets, roadside stands or u-pick farms located throughout the Valley.

Walla Walla’s burgeoning culinary scene not only includes an array of fine-dining establishments and world-class chefs but numerous festivals and events devoted to the culinary arts and savoring the tastes of the Valley. They include:

Farmers Markets – Walla Walla is home to not one, but two weekly Farmers Markets that run from May through October. The Downtown Walla Walla Farmers Market, which features more than 70 local vendors selling fresh meats, produce, cheese, and other specialty items to residents, chefs, and visitors, operates on Thursday evenings in Heritage Square Park and on Saturdays at the downtown Farmers Market Pavilion. The second farmers market, which also operates on Saturdays, is located at the Walla Walla County Fairgrounds. .

February is for Foodies – This month-long celebration of the culinary side of Walla Walla includes culinary weekend experiences with cooking demonstration classes, special prix fixe menus at area restaurants, artisan chocolates in select winery tasting rooms, and more.

Feast Walla Walla – Held in April amid the charming historic streets of downtown, this event celebrates the emergence of Spring with fine food and wine – all from local purveyors; <http://downtownwallawalla.com/feast-walla-walla.html>

Walla Walla Sweet Onion Festival – Annual July event pays tribute to the Walla Walla Sweet with chef's competitions, cooking demonstrations and plenty of opportunity to taste Washington's State Vegetable at its peak of sweetness. <http://www.sweetonions.org/>

About Walla Walla:

As the unofficial capital of Washington wine country, Walla Walla is home to more than 130 wineries, a nationally recognized culinary scene, access to an abundance of outdoor recreation, and an arts & entertainment scene that rivals cities many times its size. This community of just over 33,000 residents is known for many things, including its friendliness and hospitality, the quality of its wine, and of course the famous Walla Walla Sweet Onion. An easy and scenic four-hour drive from Seattle, Portland, or Boise, Walla Walla can also be accessed via Alaska Airlines daily non-stop flights from Seattle. For more information and to begin planning a trip to Walla Walla, visit www.visitwallawalla.com.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: On the following pages are two recipes that rely heavily on foods grown within the Walla Walla Valley.

Walla Walla Sweet Onion and Beet Salad

Courtesy of sweetonions.org

INGREDIENTS

Dressing:

½ cup olive oil

4 TBL orange juice

1 TBL Dijon mustard

1 tsp white wine vinegar

2 TBL fresh dill

1 TBL honey

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Whisk together all ingredients until well blended. Season to taste, and set aside.

Salad:

6 medium beets (2 pounds), stems removed

2 TBL olive oil

2 medium Walla Walla Sweet Onions, peeled and cut into quarters

½ pound mixed lettuce greens

¼ pound blue cheese, block or crumbled

DIRECTIONS:

Place beets in baking pan, drizzle with oil and season with salt. Cover with foil and bake 1 hour, or until tender when pierced with a knife. When cool enough to handle, peel the beets and cut into quarters. Add the onions and toss with prepared dressing. Serve on bed of wild green and grate block of blue cheese over the salad or sprinkle with crumbles.

Tomato, Fresh Cheese and Watercress Salad

Courtesy *Sunset Magazine*, "Spring in Walla Walla," April 2005 issue

INGREDIENTS:

3 TBL red wine vinegar

2 TBL minced shallot

1 TBL honey

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and pepper

10 ounces watercress (2 bunches), rinsed and stemmed

2 cups cherry tomatoes (about 10 oz) rinsed, stemmed and halved

8 ounces fresh sheep or goat's milk cheese (such as the Fresh Herbed Chevre from Montelilet Fromagerie)

DIRECTIONS:

In a bowl, mix first three ingredients. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in olive oil and whisk until mixture is thick and emulsified. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add watercress and mix to coat.

Divide watercress mixture among six plates, then arrange tomatoes and a chunk of cheese on each plate. Sprinkle salads with salt and pepper, and drizzle tomatoes and cheese with additional olive oil.