



## A Natural Touch for Gibbet Hill Grill

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Updated: 06/14/2010 07:01:37 AM EDT



Gibbet Hill Grill owner Jed Webber, center, along with farm manager Kate Rowe, left, and Executive Chef Tom Fosnot check out fresh herbs and vegetables. SUN / David H. Brow

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GROTON -- Ask Tom Fosnot how he whips up savory dishes like roasted chicken with garlicky kale on the side, or meatloaf with citrus-glazed carrots for patrons at the Gibbet Hill Grill.

The executive chef will tell you it involves plucking vegetables from the fluffy soil several hundred feet outside the restaurant's back door. The 3-acre field will soon start producing mounds of Swiss Chard, beets, lettuce and nearly 50 other kinds of vegetables.

Patrons should expect some ad-lib menu changes with a tomato-sauce theme because it might turn out

to be another bountiful season for the restaurant's tomato field. From deep-wine red to green, 25 colorful varieties of tomatoes will garnish the plates. And if Fosnot wants fresh arugula and basil for pesto, he needs only to take a few steps out of the door, and about 20 different herbs shooting from container gardens will be waiting for him.

This is as fresh as restaurant meal ingredients can get. There is no need to truck in produce across the country -- except for lemons and oranges and other things that don't grow here -- or worry about greenhouse gas-generating pesticides that might have been used on foods. That's the point Gibbet Hill owner Jed Webber is trying to get across.

"We want to show people that local foods can be an important part of restaurants," Webber said.

Gibbet Hill Grill, a popular steakhouse off Route 40, has been largely "self-sustainable" since last summer, growing more than half

of the produce needed for restaurant meals right on the property. Among the 100 acres of preservation land that has been used to raise beef cattle for the past six decades, 3 acres are dedicated for the new vegetable field.

With the help of Kate Rowe, Gibbet Hill's farm manager, the restaurant had a successful first season last year. This year, Webber decided to expand the farm operation to share the crops with local residents through a newly launched Community Supported Agriculture program.

Under the CSA, Gibbet Hill provides a basketful of produce, worth about \$30, to contracted clients each week from June to November. People quickly signed up to fill the 50 available slots for the \$600-a-season program, leaving another 50 residents on

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a waiting list.

Webber's goal isn't to make money from the CSA. Rather, it's to show people how sustainable agriculture can be incorporated into restaurant businesses, and he hopes that will attract more patrons to the restaurant. Though it's rare to for a restaurant to have a large tract of land on site, even a small space could be turned into a crop garden. Scarlet Oak Tavern in Hingham, which the Webbers also own, is using its side yard to grow herbs and other things.

Fosnot, who has worked at such eateries as Rocca's Restaurant and Bar in Boston and Blu Rialto in Cambridge, said he came to work at Gibbet Hill in March because of the restaurant's farm. More diners are asking chefs where the foods served come from, he said. The growing season has only begun, and Fosnot is looking forward to using the tasteful crops to do some culinary magic.

Growing own foods isn't without downsides, though. Cooks at Gibbet Hill were bombarded with tomato crops last year while spinach never grew. Not all vegetables grow at a same pace.

"The nature has its own schedule," Fosnot said.

That tests a chef's creativity. The restaurant stored gigantic winter squashes last year to serve hearty soup through the snowy season.

Webber said not having to buy as many vegetables has helped reduce the produce cost drastically. On the other hand, the restaurant now has additional expenditures for the farm operation. The CSA program helps offset those costs, Webber said.

This year, Gibbet Farm has added bee hives on the

field and is planting clovers between rows of vegetable plants. Gibbet now leases the cow farm to Springdell Farm of Littleton, which is raising the cows on site.

The CSA baskets will occasionally include some beef. When there is a large number of certain vegetables, the restaurant may make jams, chutney and pies with them to throw into the baskets, Webber said.

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