

The Seasonal Plate: seasonal inspired food pairings

by Sue Ready

Keep your soul rooted in gratitude and your branches open to blessings. — Mary Davis

Lenten special

Looking for a meatless meal ready in under 25 minutes and all made in one pot?

Jasmine rice with garlic shrimp and broccoli may just be the recipe you've been looking for. One-pot meals are always a plus in meal planning. Shrimp should be peeled and deveined before sautéing. Leaving tails on is a matter of personal preference. The recipe serves four and the meal was served with a slice of French almond cake.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup uncooked jasmine rice
- 2 tablespoons butter, divided
- 1/2 cup chopped sweet onion
- 3 large garlic cloves, minced
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon parsley flakes
- Lemon zest from one large lemon
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1- 16 Oz. package frozen uncooked shrimp (small 50-60 count) thawed
- 2 cups broccoli florets
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 3 tablespoons dry white wine

Directions:

Shrimp should be peeled and deveined before sautéing. Leaving tails on is a matter of personal preference.

In a large soup pot, melt one tablespoon of butter and sauté shrimp with garlic. Remove and set aside. Cover to keep warm.

In the same pot, melt butter and sauté onions. Add the uncooked rice and stir-fry for 2 minutes. Add 3 cups of chicken broth, bring to a boil, cover, and reduce the heat. Cook rice for 13 minutes until al dente. Add in broccoli, garlic shrimp, lemon juice, parsley flakes and white wine.



Stir well and cook for 5 minutes. Add parmesan cheese and cook for 2 more minutes. Serve immediately.

French almond cake

Cook's notes: An incredibly delicious cake and it's one bowl, no mixer and just a few minutes to put together. The cake is perfect for your next coffee gathering or dinner.

The recipe is from Chris Scheuer.

Ingredients:

For the almonds:

- 1/2 cup sliced almonds

For the glaze:

- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest
- 3 tablespoons fresh orange juice
- 3/4 cup powdered sugar plus more for sprinkling
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract

For the cake:

- 3/4 cup plain yogurt or Greek yogurt
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 4 large eggs
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup almond flour not almond meal

- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 3/4 cup canola oil or any other neutral-flavored oil

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place almonds in a small baking pan. Spread to a single layer. Bake for 10 minutes or until just beginning to turn pale golden brown, stirring every 5 minutes. Remove from oven and set aside to cool.

Spray a 9-inch round cake pan (with at least 2-inch tall sides) with baking spray. Line the bottom of the pan with parchment paper and spray parchment paper lightly. Set aside.

Combine the orange zest, orange juice, powdered sugar and extracts in a small bowl for the glaze. Stir with a whisk until smooth. Cover and set aside.

In a large bowl, combine the yogurt, sugar, and eggs, whisk until well blended.

Add all-purpose flour, almond flour, baking powder, salt, and extracts. Whisk to combine.

Add the oil and stir well or whisk to blend until smooth 2-3 minutes.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 22-25 minutes or until the cake feels springy to the touch in the center and a toothpick or cake tester inserted into the center comes out clean. Be careful not to overbake.

Cool the cake on a wire rack for 10 minutes; then turn it out of the pan onto the rack.

While the cake is still warm, using a pastry brush, gently pat the glaze all over the cake.

Some of it will drip off, but most of it will soak in. Sprinkle the toasted almonds over the top of the cake while the glaze is wet and pat gently. Allow the cake to cool completely.

Optional adding a drizzle of cherry sauce.

Sue Ready is a freelance writer, poet, food writer, book reviewer, and former middle school teacher.

Blackhawks big bluestem adds bold color to the landscape

by Melinda Myers

No matter your garden style, you are likely to find a place for this year's Perennial Plant of the Year, Blackhawks big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii* 'Blackhawks'). You'll enjoy the beauty it adds to your gardens and low maintenance it requires to thrive.

This cultivar of our native big bluestem provides vertical interest, motion and bold color to the landscape. Its leaves start out dark green and develop reddish-purple tips throughout the growing season. Flowers appear in August and by September the leaves and stems of the plant turn a deep purple hue.

Hardy in zones 3 to 9, it prefers full sun and adapts to a wide range of soil but may flop in fertile, moist conditions. Once established, it is drought tolerant. Make sure it receives needed moisture and prop-

er care for the first two years while developing its robust, more drought-tolerant root system.

In addition to drought tolerance, Blackhawks big bluestem has no major pests or disease problems. Just cut it back to the ground in late winter before new growth begins. Its overall excellent performance made it one of the top-rated ornamental grasses in the Chicago Botanic Garden's Evaluation Study of Hardy Ornamental Grasses.

Big bluestem was the dominant grass of the prairies and largely responsible for the formation of prairie sod. This drought-tolerant grass is a host plant for many skipper and provides shelter and food for songbirds. It grows 5 to 8 feet tall and reseeds readily, making it hard for many home gardeners to include in their landscape. It is smaller in size than

the big bluestem species, just 5 feet tall and 24 inches wide, making it more suitable for home landscapes. Use it as a screen, backdrop in garden beds or as part of mixed borders. It combines nicely with other perennials, like Zagreb threadleaf coreopsis, calamint, liatris, Rudbeckia, sedum, asters and more.

Blackhawks big bluestem, like other Perennial Plants of the Year, was selected for its low maintenance, pest and disease resistance and ability to thrive in a wide range of climates. It joins past winners like little bluestem, butterfly weed, Millenium allium, American Gold-rush Rudbeckia and Amsonia hubrichtii.

These winners are selected by Perennial Plant Association members, which include hundreds of horticulture experts like landscapers, designers, professors, plant breeders,

growers, retailers and public garden curators. You can find out more about this nonprofit program and past Perennial Plants of the Year at <https://perennialplantoftheyear.com>

Look for opportunities to include this year's Perennial Plant of the Year in your gardens. You'll enjoy its beauty and the benefits it provides, whether your gardens are informal, naturalistic or a cottage-style.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including *The Midwest Gardener's Handbook, 2nd Edition* and *Small Space Gardening*. She hosts *The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything"* streaming courses and the nationally syndicated *Melinda's Garden Moment* radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine and her website is www.MelindaMyers.com



Blackhawks big bluestem is low maintenance and combines nicely with other perennials. Photo courtesy of www.MelindaMyers.com

More Minnesotans look to MNSure for help

ST. PAUL — More Minnesotans turned to MNSure for help finding private health insurance plans, even though fewer enrolled in those plans due to the loss of enhanced tax credits and resulting higher premiums.

Enrollment in private health insurance plans fell by 8 percent during MNSure's recent annual open enrollment period. At the end of open enrollment Jan. 15, there were 139,251 Minnesotans enrolled in 2026 coverage through MNSure compared to 151,512 last year.

"MNSure worked hard to help Minnesotans find affordable coverage this year," said MNSure CEO Libby Caulum, "but because Congress allowed the enhanced savings to expire, we heard from many consumers who felt priced out of the marketplace."

MNSure logged 162,211 private health plan "sign-ups," a 3 percent drop from last year, which includes passively enrolled consumers and those who terminated or canceled their plans. Final figures are likely to change over the spring as consumers confirm their coverage as first premiums come due.

Consumers searched for cheaper options.

A record-setting number of Minnesotans contacted MNSure to navigate the changes in premiums. Calls to MNSure's help line topped 165,000 — an increase of more than 29 percent over last year. Traffic to MNSure.org was record-setting with big increases in clicks on links to learn more about "Financial Help" and how to connect to free help from a MNSure-certified assister.

Consumers also reached out to MNSure's certified assisters, brokers and navigators for help to find cheaper options in the face of rising premiums. MNSure saw an 87 percent increase in the number of enrollees who switched health insurance plans this year. Most of those who made a change went with a lower-cost option.

Minnesotans who don't have health insurance and missed the Jan. 15 deadline to enroll may still have opportunities to get covered. Minnesotans who experience a major life event (such as getting married, having a baby, or losing employer-sponsored insurance) may be eligible to shop for coverage through MNSure outside of the open enrollment period.



Paws and Claws Pets of the Week

Meet Dunk! This boy has been on the hunt for a home a while now. He came in with two of his siblings at the beginning of September. They were originally outdoor farm cats but have adjusted to the indoor lifestyle. Dunk is 11 months old and would make a fabulous, friendly mouser or shop cat for someone. He lived happily with dogs, other cats, children and chickens in his previous home. He can be shy at first, but warms up to the idea of scratches and affection once he trusts you. Odin is a wiggly boy full of life. A 1-year-old mix, we can't say for sure what his breed is, but he's 100 percent adorable. He's dog friendly, but hasn't been introduced to young children or cats yet. He would likely appreciate a playmate that matches his energy in his new home. Odin has been patiently waiting for someone to take a chance on him since October. He doesn't typically present well in the kennel due to his excitement — he's quite literally "off the walls!" But, we promise he's a good boy. He's just can't contain how excited he is to meet you. Odin weighs just over 50 pounds. Do either of these pets sound perfect for you? Come and find out! All pets at Paws+Claws Rescue and Resort are spayed/neutered, micro-chipped and up to date on vaccines and dewormer. Cats are FIV/FelV tested and dogs are heartworm tested. Call (218) 675-7297 for more information on these amazing shelter pets. Photos submitted