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## Dining

### Saving Up for a Wintry Day

By CATHY BARROW

IT HAS become commonplace to be offered house-made pickles with house-made charcuterie in restaurants across the country. Maybe even a spoonful of chutney the chef has put up.

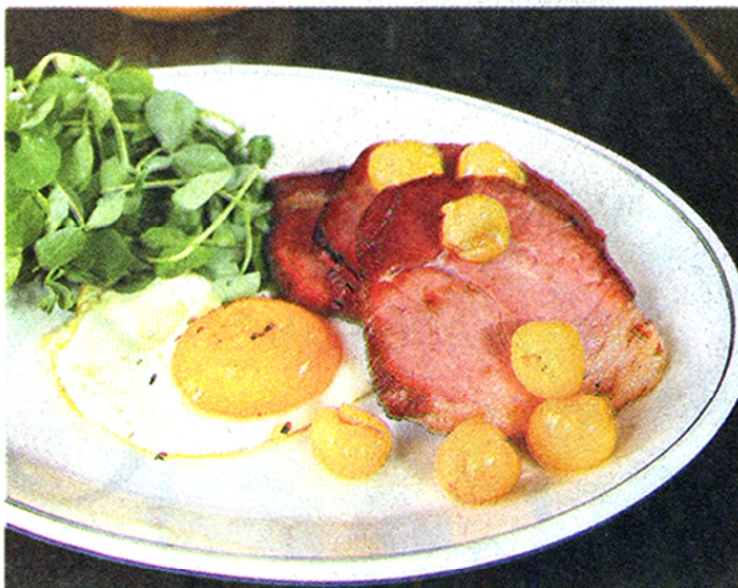
But at a handful of restaurants — places like Woodberry Kitchen in Baltimore; Farmstead in Providence, R.I.; Blackberry Farm in Walland, Tenn.; and the Herbfarm in Woodinville, Wash. — something more is going on. In those kitchens, chefs have embraced preserving and canning beyond making their own pickles. If local food tastes best, they reason, then why not put away enough to get through the winter, just as some home cooks do?

Stocking the pantry of a restaurant is a bit more complicated than putting a few jars of jam in the basement or the garage. Cost, storage and scale all come into play. How many kitchens can afford to turn a pastry chef into a canner? How many thousands of pounds of tomatoes need to be put up to provide a winter's worth of marinara? Where will the chef put it all?

Yet chefs are not dissuaded. Sean Brock is famous for his efforts to use food exclusively from below the Mason-Dixon line in his restaurants in Charleston, S.C., Husk and McCrady's, to the point of experimenting with making his own olive oil. And Magnus Nilsson forages for everything on the menu at Faviken, his 14-seat restaurant in western Sweden.

At Woodberry Kitchen, the chef Spike Gjerde collaborates with local growers to stock an abundant pantry, serving diners at his 162-seat restaurant. In five years, he has reduced his four-page grocery list for the local restaurant supply company to a single page.

He began in late 2007, before Woodberry first opened. "We got in the kitchen and froze 10 cases of tomatoes and roasted, peeled and seeded 10 cases of peppers,"



**STOCKING UP** At Woodberry Kitchen in Baltimore, Spike Gjerde, top, preserves and cans local food. Middle, griddled city ham on an herb-studded buttermilk biscuit with an egg and warmed pickled golden cherries. Bottom, jars of preserved produce adorn the walls.

land-grown fish pepper, mashed with salt, aged for a year and stirred into vinegar to make Snake Oil, the house-made incendiary hot sauce that replaces Tabasco.

"It's not enough to put on the menu, 'We source locally whenever possible,'" Mr. Gjerde said. "We want to make it possible year round."

The winter menu includes milky white Hakurei turnips quartered in the kitchen, blistered over a wood fire, then salted and bathed in "tomato honey," a byproduct of Mr. Gjerde's tomato canning, in which leftover tomato water is sweetened with sugar and reduced to a heady syrup. The brunch menu lists ring bologna on a pretzel roll with a crispy cucumber and pepper relish. All are made on the premises.

There is griddled city ham on an herb-studded buttermilk biscuit with a sunnyside-up egg and warmed pickled golden cherries. There are country hams, too, hanging to dry in a specially outfitted walk-in cooler.

"When we finally started slicing our country ham, after a year of waiting and hoping, it was one of the greatest revelations of my whole culinary career," Mr. Gjerde said. "It was something that came from here, from a farmer we knew; it came through this kitchen, as a whole animal. It's just one of the most delicious things you can put in your mouth."

Mr. Gjerde said he goes to the trouble because the food is better.



he said. "That was our big effort for the year."

The tomatoes lasted three weeks. Mr. Gjerde realized this grand idea was going to require more planning. Now, he and his canners walk the fields in early spring with the farmers, discussing expectations for the coming growing season. In August, they are in the fields bemoaning the tomatoes' decline because of late blight.

The chef's enthusiasm soon led to another set of challenges. "I have a soft spot that is pretty well known in these parts for purchasing just about anything anyone will offer me," he said. "I never say no to growers. I was calling and working with farms, and on the fly they say, 'I've got 1,000 pounds of tomatoes,' and I'd say, 'Great!' And there would already be 1,000 pounds back in the kitchen. The canners were pulling their hair out. A light bulb went off, and I thought, 'These guys should have a role, not only in creating the food, but they should manage these purchases.'"

This fall, the three kitchen workers dedicated to canning — one a former pastry chef, another a former academic and the third



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a home canner who came to the restaurant looking for work — processed more than 6,000 pounds of tomatoes. Summer fruit was jarred as jams and sorbet starters and syrups. Rows of

glistening jars fill the hallways, decorate the dining rooms and are stashed in any other available space.

In the back hallway, charred white oak barrels hold a Mary-

"If I could get strawberry jam made with local strawberries that met my specifications, sure, I'd buy it from that producer," he said. For now, he continues to whittle down the list of items he buys from restaurant supply.

Asked about his costs, Mr. Gjerde says he doesn't analyze them, but thinks they are higher. "Purchasing produce from local farmers, plus the work we put in it, equals a slightly higher cost than buying those products already processed," he said.

But he added: "Chefs come through here and say, 'We're too small to do this,' or 'We're too big to do this.'"

"Who am I, Goldilocks? I don't think so. We have just hit on a way to do it here."

Lately, he is working to replicate the acidity of lemons with something local. He's playing with verjus, juice from green, unripe grapes from Maryland's Black Ankle Vineyards. Woodberry has introduced a verjus mignonette to pair with oysters, joining three other house-made sauces: a classic cocktail sauce, a pickleback mignonette and Snake Oil, straight from his back hallway.