

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

autumn 2011

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



Open through
October 27th —
rain or shine!

Thursday afternoons
1:30 to 6:00 pm
Belmont Center parking lot

in this issue . . .

Appreciating beans
Interview with Samira's Homemade
Roots & Sprouts—a look back
Recipe for colorful bean salad—2 ways

A Closer Look at Beans

An appreciation of their virtues and versatility

You probably already know that beans are legumes. Just what is a legume? A legume is any one of the thousands of plants in the family *Leguminosae*, which have seed pods that split along both sides when ripe. An example is the pea plant with its "peas in a pod." Besides peas, edible legumes include lentils, peanuts, and, of course, various beans. Shape distinguishes beans from other legumes. Beans are typically kidney-shaped or oval, while peas are round and lentils are disk-like.

A long history

Beans are one of the longest-cultivated plants, even predating ceramics. (Perhaps humans invented urns to carry all those beans!) Beans are thought to have been grown in Asia since the seventh millennium BC, and they appeared in both Europe and South America around the second millennium BC. Beans were buried with the dead in Egypt and they are threshed in *The Iliad*.

A "superfood"

In percent composition of the human diet, the legume family is perhaps second only to the grasses. But in terms of protein and certain vitamins, legumes are tops! Their seeds have twice as much protein as grains and are high in iron and B vitamins. They are also high in protein, complex carbohydrates, dietary fiber, and many minerals, yet low in fat and cholesterol—a perfect food!

Besides their nutritional value, beans are readily available, affordable, and easy to keep. Dried beans can be stored in a cool dry place for a long time, and cooked beans freeze well.

And versatile as well

Beans are versatile and appear in many guises across cuisines—from Italian white bean soup to Mexican black bean chili. Incorporate beans and other legumes into your daily diet:

- Prepare bean dips and spreads for a tasty appetizer.
- Use beans to make a one-pot soup or chili.
- Use lentils or split peas in a last-minute meal.
- Add beans to complement a meat-based menu.
- Replace a meat product with beans to provide protein. For example, incorporate beans into a vegetable stir-fry.
- Add cooled beans to a leafy salad, or make a classic three bean salad with kidney, green, and garbanzo beans (also called chickpeas).
- You can even have beans for breakfast. Tell your kids that's how American cowboys started their day!

Beans can be eaten in different ways at various stages of their development:

Immature beans: Both the bean (the seed) and pod are young and tender, and can be eaten. Think of *haricots verts* beans or yellow wax beans, which can be cooked until tender and served with a squeeze of lemon. Sometimes the whole plant can be eaten—such as the many types of bean sprouts that can be enjoyed raw as a salad or added to a sandwich.

Fresh shelled beans: The pod is tough but the bean can be removed from the pod, cooked for a short time, and eaten. Think of young

(continued on page 4)

Middle Eastern Dips and More

An interview with Samira's Homemade

POP QUIZ: Which BFM vendor sells beans every week at the Market (and all winter, too)?

ANSWER: Samira's Homemade, of course, where beans are deliciously disguised in tempting Middle Eastern dips. *Roots & Sprouts* talked to Samira Hamdoun, co-owner with her husband Ragab Hamdoun, about the founding of her Belmont-based business and plans for the future.

R&S: How did your business get started?

Samira: The idea for Samira's Homemade came to me during a house-warming party in the fall of 2006. Harvard Law School Visiting Professor, Ehud Kamar from Jerusalem, invited me, as his Faculty Assistant, to help him prepare some food for his party. I was surprised to find out so many people loved my hummus and baba ganoush, and offered to buy it if I would sell it.

Discovering the taste of a homemade hummus, and comparing it to the taste of the commercial hummus, faculty and students were telling me it was the best hummus they had ever tasted. At that time, a business opportunity was handed to me and I had to find the way to make it happen.



R&S: What keeps you excited about your business?

Samira: My interactions with customers really motivate me. One of my favorite stories from the Belmont Farmers' Market is when a boy came to my table and asked to try a sample. Soon, he returned for another sample. A few minutes later, he brought his mom and asked her to buy the hummus for him. She told him that if she bought the hummus, he could not get the cookies he wanted. He thought for a minute. I was very surprised when he chose the hummus!

R&S: Many people know hummus, but don't know about ful medammes. Can you tell us about it?

Samira: Ful medammes is an Egyptian national dish that is similar to hummus but made with brown baby fava beans instead of chickpeas. It was used in Middle Eastern countries since the fourth century. Ancient Egyptians ate ful medammes. It is very high in protein, and low in calories, and is a very filling and nutritious dip.

R&S: What other products do you sell at BFM?

Samira: Muhammara is another Middle Eastern dip that we sell. It is sweet and spicy, made with fire-roasted red pepper, walnuts, bread crumbs, and pomegranate molasses. We also sell baba ganoush, tabouli salad, olives, stuffed grape leaves, and pita bread that is baked and packaged exclusively for us by Helen's Bakery.

R&S: What are the plans for the future?

Samira: Samira's Homemade is growing rapidly and competing with big brands such as Sabra, Tribe, and Cedar's Hummus. The increasing demand for healthy food, high in protein and free of preservatives, has made Samira's Homemade products very

popular. *The Boston Globe*, *Edible Boston*, and local newspapers have all featured articles about it.

As a small business with limited resources, yet with a big demand, the next step would be to automate the production system and become a nationwide producer. A team of students from Babson College is helping me write a business plan, as I intend to take my products to all Whole Foods Market stores in New England and, in a year or two, become a nationwide producer.

R&S: We've heard you will be opening a new store in Belmont! When does it open and where is it?

Samira: Yes, our store at 203 Belmont Street (Tel: 617-489-3400) will open at the end of October. For a complete list of locations that carry our products, please visit our website: www.samirashomemade.com



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The Market is a member of the Belmont Center Business Association.

BEST OF BOSTON 2009

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2011 Vendors

- **ButterGirl Baking Co.** fresh baked treats made with a whole lotta luv
- **Carlisle Honey** local honey and hand-made beeswax candles
- **Coastal Vineyards** of South Dartmouth
- **Coutts Specialty Foods** jams, jellies, applesauce, relishes
- **Dick's Market Garden Farm** vegetables, fruits, and plants
- **The Farm School** organic vegetables, fruits, flowers, eggs, grass-fed meat
- **Fior d'Italia** pasta in many different shapes and flavors
- **Golden Girl** homemade granola, treats
- **Goodies** award-winning, better-than-homemade cookies
- **Hmong Farms at Flats Mentor Farm** fresh produce featuring Asian vegetables
- **Hutchins Farm** certified organic plants, vegetables, herbs, small fruit, and apples
- **Japanese Bakery** French pastries with a Japanese twist
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, and plants
- **Lawton's Family Farm** fresh cheeses and veal, *Fiore di Nonno* mozzarella
- **Mamadou Bakery** handcrafted breads
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **On the Edge** hand sharpening of kitchen knives, scissors, shears and tools
- **Samira's Homemade** Middle Eastern dips and salads, freshly made, delicious
- **Sassy River Sauces** savory sauces without the fat
- **Sassy Sauces** sweet dessert sauces
- **Sfolia's Pizzelles** Italian treats hand-made in Belmont
- **Stillman's at the Turkey Farm** grass-fed meat and freshly cut flowers
- **Sweet Lolo's** gourmet, handcrafted caramels and brittles
- **Turkey Brook Farm** home of Red Label Poultry, raised in the French tradition
- **Turtle Creek Winery** of Lincoln
- **Underwood Greenhouses** potted plants grown in Belmont
- **Westport Rivers Vineyard & Winery**
- **Wild Acre Inns** flowers, herbs and more



Not all vendors appear every week. Check the website or e-newsletter for complete details.

Food for Thought

Over the years, Roots & Sprouts has grown alongside the Market

It is never too soon to look back. One of the joys of life is retrospection. Let us review.

In April 2006, with an irrepressible tomato on its cover, *Roots & Sprouts* debuted in the Belmont library foyer and local shop entrances. The first issue was full of practical introductions. Readers learned how the Belmont Farmer's Market evolved from an avid group called Belmont Walks/Bikes, and what to expect from the Leonard Street parking lot on Thursday afternoons.

That season, topics were largely educational: definitions of terms ("A farmers' market lexicon," June 2006), deep linguistic inquiries ("What is a tomato, anyway?," August 2006), nutrition quizzes, and serial interviews with participating farms ("Know your farmer, know your food"). For clippers, recipes appeared—and they continue to appear—on the last page. Sometimes they were local (Patou's Thai dressing and, more recently, the Craft Beer Cellar's hefeweizen barbecue sauce), sometimes ethnic (tzimmes), carbohydrate-laden (ciabatta), and even thematic (frittata, for the All-Egg Issue).

The BFM grew into a forum for communities and causes relating to local food, health, and good nutrition; so did the newsletter. In midsummer 2007, *Roots & Sprouts* profiled Sustainable Belmont—a local committee working toward climate action, green buildings, clean air campaigns, and connecting local farmers with schools, nursing homes, and hospitals. In spring 2010, it described the Pomona Project—an effort to repopulate Belmont yards in the present with edible fruit bushes and ground cover from the past. And in late summer 2011, it discussed the many meanings of the food justice movement.

Nutritional education continued, too: a piece on the coded stickers found on supermarket fruits and vegetables ("Deciphering PLUs and other tidbits for savvy shoppers," May 2007), tips on food preservation techniques, and suggestions for local winter food sources. There was a worried assessment of the national pollinator decline ("The plight of the honeybee," late summer 2007), and an analysis of Community Supported Agriculture ("CSAs, not just for summertime," autumn 2010).

In other words, in four pages, there was plenty for everyone. For the literary-minded, there was an invitation to One Book One Belmont (the chosen book for 2009 being Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*). For the historically minded, there were pieces on Old Farming Belmont and the 19th century Strawberry Festival. For the policy-minded, announcements of the 501(c)(3) status of the Belmont Food Collaborative and discussion of the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, which has helped save over 750 Massachusetts farms. Readers could dig deeply and widely (the roots), or learn about dreams and visions made manifest (the sprouts). Or, they could just cook.

Six years on, that plump masthead of a tomato continues to bloom. If you sliced it in half for culinary purposes (say, "Stone Hearth Pizza's Panzanella," August 2006), it would be as perfectly ripe today as it was six years ago. Miraculous tomato! Miraculous newsletter!

— Elissa Ely

*In four pages,
there was plenty for
everyone*

The Belmont Food Collaborative's Board of Directors and Roots & Sprouts editor welcome your suggestions for future topics to cover in this newsletter. We also welcome writers! Please contact us at belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.com if you are interested. All writing and editing for this newsletter is done by volunteers.

(continued from page 1)

sweet peas or of *edamame*—the immature soybeans that are sold in the pod—either one makes a healthy snack for children.

Dried shelled beans: Both the pod and bean have dried on the stalk and the bean moves freely within the pod, like a rattle. The beans are taken out of the pod and stored for future use. Think of an endless variety of colors: white cannellini, tan garbanzo, green mung, dark red kidney, speckled pinto, and black beans.

Soaking and cooking

For dried beans, the soaking and cooking times vary. Broad fava beans and soybeans require 12 hours of soaking and 3 hours of

cooking. But lentils and split peas require no soaking and only 30 to 45 minutes of cooking. Most beans—black, navy, kidney, garbanzo, and lima—require about 4 hours of soaking and 1 to 2 hours of cooking. But for all beans, you can expect just over 2 cups of cooked beans for 1 cup of uncooked.

Local legumes

Where can you find legumes at the Belmont Farmers' Market?

- You can find pea tendrils at Flats Mentor Farm. When young and delicate, pea tendrils make a delightful salad. When more mature, they can be flash-sautéed in olive oil and garlic.

- At Samira's Homemade, you can find a variety of Egyptian and Lebanese dips, including *ful medammes* made from fava beans and *hummus* made from chickpeas. (Samira's is profiled on page 2.)
- At various vendors, you can find peas and green beans of various kinds. Look out for seasonal specialties.

— Sara Cummins



Colorful Bean Salad

This salad can be made with shell beans (shelled and cooked) or snap beans (left in the pod and eaten raw). The dressing works equally well with either option. The flavor is best if the salad is allowed to marinate overnight, but if you're in a rush, it's still quite tasty the same day. Feel free to experiment with different beans—just make sure that you have a nice variety of color for an attractive and delicious salad!

Dressing

2 tablespoons olive oil	1 teaspoon oregano
¼ cup red wine vinegar	¼ teaspoon salt
2 cloves garlic	½ teaspoon pepper
1 tablespoon basil	Dash of cayenne

Add olive oil and vinegar to a small bowl or pint jar. Mince garlic and basil and add to mixture with oregano, salt, pepper, and cayenne. Mix well and set aside.

Shell beans

- 1½ cup chickpeas
- 1½ cup kidney beans
- 1½ cup pinto beans

Combine beans in a medium bowl. If using canned beans, drain and rinse them first. Mix beans, then add dressing and toss well. Refrigerate overnight.

or Snap beans

- 2 cups green beans (any color)
- 2 cups wax beans (any color)

Wash beans and cut into two-inch pieces. Combine in a medium bowl and mix well. Add dressing and toss. Refrigerate for at least an hour before serving.

— Becky Prior