During the summer, I channel Grandma

BY EMILY HORTON THE WASHINGTON POST

grandmother's way summer's pebbleskinned, canary yellow crookneck summer squash, which she grew in the neck of the Florida Panhandle, was to cook it with browned onions until it was falling apart, then cook it a little bit past that. It came out of the pot spreadable as jam, concentrated and melting, its sweetness hemmed by lashings of black pepper.

Hers is the approach I have in mind when I cook summer squash and zucchini, cut into thin discs and braised slowly just until they start to collapse. I love squash other ways, too - grated raw for an herb-strewn salad or seared in a hot pan until its edges caramelize to a deep burnish – but nothing quite captures its buttery, creamy flavor like sweating it in its own juices.

Cooking vegetables to total tenderness — until, some would say, they're done isn't the American way with the produce of summer. Braising and stewing and sweating are techniques we turn to in cooler months, when spending time at the stove feels more respite than duty. In the

bowl and the grill, for summoning sensations of taste and texture that contrast, rather than align, with the summer heat and humidity.

But look to the silky braised greens of the deep South, or the slowly caramelized medley of peppers, onions and zucchini known in Turkey as marmouma, or the sweet and creamy eggplant-sauced pastas of Italy, and you'll see a powerfully delicious reason to keep summer vegetables on the stove. Cooking them low and slow develops flavors that brief cooking merely skims. It coaxes them into denser, sweeter, more mellow and yet more intensely flavored versions of themselves.

My favorite example of this transformation is the flat, mossy-hued green bean typically referred to as a Romano bean. Even when raw, this type of bean can have remarkable depth of flavor; the integrity of its snap is something to marvel over. Sauteed or steamed until al dente, its character is little moved, the flavor still a little grassy, its juicy crunch subdued but still

Cooked slowly over a gentle

hot months of August, our in- flame for an hour or more, clination is toward the salad with a little garlic, a glug of oil and a few tablespoons of water, Romanos are transformed. They are dense and meaty, exquisitely beany, the texture tender and supple. They beg to be eaten from the pot over the stove, from the refrigerator with fingers. Paired with some good cheese and a hunk of bread, they can stand in for dinner on a lowkey night.

The same general idea can be applied to zucchini, string beans, green peas, asparagus, leafy greens, bell peppers, broccoli, cabbage, fennel.

For every vegetable, the precise cooking time and the amount of liquid you may add will vary depending on variety, age and size. "It's not really about length of time; it's more about the yield that determines when they're done. Each vegetable will tell you," says chef and author Gabrielle Hamilton

She compares soft-cooked vegetables to slow-cooked meat, clarifying that the process isn't about overcooking: 'It's about opening the vegetable up until it starts to get juicy and starts to run and has a more slippery and delicious

If the heat is too high, the denser, lower-water-content vegetables will cook unevenly, breaking down before sufficiently cooking through. Too much water, and they'll leach much of their flavor into the cooking liquid — a recipe for good pot liquor, but only if you'll be drinking it.

Too much of both is just a short step away from boiling, a likely cause of many longheld vegetable grievances. It's also the surest route to nutrient loss, as those vitamins go into the cooking liquid, too. But there's an easy fix: "If the cooking water is to be consumed as a part of the dish . . . then overall nutrient retention will be high, regardless of temperature (usually simmering) or time," Robert Parker, professor of nutritional sciences at Cornell University, told me in an email.

So use as little liquid as possible, and serve the vegetables with their concentrated juices. The heat should be low to moderate, the liquid barely enough to burble around the vegetables' contours. If your vegetables are juicy enough to start, you may not need liquid

Higher-water-content summer squash or broccoli will soften more quickly than

choices such as kale or pole beans, but this is not a process to rush

My favorite recipes for long-cooked vegetables take around an hour on the stove, but it's a relatively idle one; they mostly take care of themselves, as long as you're free to offer a turn of the spatula every now and again.

One advisory: Best not to look to this method as a means of salvation for produce that should have been cooked days before.

You can, to a degree, hide a tired vegetable's shortcomings by overwhelming it with other flavors, whether in a soup, a stew or a vegetable stock, although it won't pull its own weight in contributions to the dish.

When that vegetable is standing alone, there's nothing to hide behind, not heat or salt or fat. Those things only amplify what you have to begin with, so the more you have – the more you have. (If you don't believe there's much to suffer in cooking old veg, try braising some just-harvested greens alongside a bunch you purchased a week ago and comparing the re-

Zucchini Pie

Yields 1 pie

- 2 cups of crushed crackers 1/4 cup or half a stick butter,
- melted 1/2 cup grated parmesan or
- romano cheese 2-3 small or 1 medium zucchini, chopped
- 1 cup shredded cheddar or mozzarella cheese
- 3 beaten eggs ½ cup milk
- Salt and pepper to taste 2 cloves garlic minced

Oregano

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Crush the crackers with a rolling pin and put into a bowl.

Melt the butter and add it and the grated parmesan to the cracker crumbs. Mix thoroughly.

Put the crumb mixture into the pie plate and press it firmly against the sides and bottom. Steam the zucchini

chunks until they are fork tender, drain, and press lightly with the back of spoon to extract a little more water, then arrange over the crumbs in the pie plate.

Sprinkle the shredded cheddar or mozzarella over the top of the zucchini.

Beat the eggs and milk together and add salt and pepper, garlic and herbs to

Pour over the top of the zucchini and cheese, and shake the pie plate a little to settle the egg mixture into the zucchini.

Bake for about 30 to 35 minutes. Let it rest for about five minutes before cutting.

Dundee Arms Inn Bumbleberry Pie

Makes 8 servings

- 1 recipe basic flaky pie pastry, double crust, refrigerated 1 hour
- 11/3 cups fresh raspberries 11/3 cups fresh blueberries 11/3 cups fresh blackberries
- 1 cup sugar 2 tablespoons fresh lemon
- juice ⅓ cup flour 2 tablespoons cold unsalted
- butter, cut into small piec-
- tablespoon coarse sugar (aka sanding sugar) or 1 tablespoon granulated
- 1. On a sheet of lightly floured waxed paper, roll the larger half of the dough pastry into a 13-inch circle with a floured rolling pin. Invert the pastry over a 9 1/2-inch deep dish pie pan; center and peel off the paper. Tuck pastry into pan, without stretching it. Sculpt and flute edge into an upstanding ridge. Place in freezer, 15 minutes; also place remaining unrolled pastry in the freezer. Heat oven to 400 degrees
- 2. Combine the berries, sugar and lemon juice in a bowl; toss gently to mix. Add flour; toss gently again. Turn the filling into the chilled pie shell, smoothing the top of

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the fruit with a spoon. Dot the top of the filling with the

3. Using the large holes of a box grater, grate the other half of the pastry directly over the fruit, as if it were a block of cheese. Using a fork, gently move the gratings here and there for an even covering. Sprinkle the coarse sugar over the top.

4. Bake pie on the center rack, 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375 degrees and rotate pie 180 degrees so that the part that faced the back of the oven now faces forward. Slide a foil-lined baking sheet onto the rack below to catch any spills. Bake until the top is golden brown and the juices bubble thickly around the edge, 25-30 min-

5. Transfer pie to a wire rack; let cool at least 2 hours before serving.

Prep: 25 minutes, plus Bake: 55-60 minutes

Nutrition information per serving: 578 calories, 28 g fat, 14 g saturated fat, 50 mg cholesterol, 77 g carbohydrates, 33 g sugar, 6 g protein, 295 mg sodium, 5 g fiber

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Taste

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I like garlic, oregano and basil with zucchini, so those were the seasonings I chose, but you could pick onion, thyme or dill instead. Season to taste.

We ate this pie as a main dish with a green salad and sauteed green beans and cherry tomatoes on the side. In fact, you could shred a little ham or crumble a little bacon into the zucchini mix if vou wanted to make it more meat-friendly, but it is substantial enough on its own.

Send queries or answers to Sandy Oliver, 1061 Main Road, Islesboro 04848. Email sandyoliver47@ gmail.com. For recipes, tell us where they came from, list ingredients, specify number of servings and do not abbreviate measurements. Include name, address and daytime phone number. Check out Sandy's blog at tastebuds. bangordailynews.com.

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A bumbleberry pie gets its name from the mix of berries that compose the filling. Though it can include other fruit, such as rhubarb, this one sticks with berries: raspberries, blueberries and blackberries.

Best

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OK, Jake, remember this: Bumbleberry is like summer itself, easy breezy, just go with the flow. You've got blueberries, blackberries and raspberries, but no strawberries? No problem. Tumble them in. There's no pattern. Just like the perfect summer day.

As those days wind down, we offer this pie, a take on bumbleberry from the 2004 book "Pie" by Ken Haedrich. Our version proves the adaptability point in that we've churned up Haedrich's mix to fit late summer fruit. And his method offers another easy-breezy advantage: The top crust is grated, as quick as mozzarella, over the pie. What could be sim-

Ken Haedrich includes this pie from a Prince Edward Island inn in his

Course

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Basic Flaky Pie Pastry

Makes enough for a double-crust 9-inch standard pie or 9½-inch deep-dish pie.

spoon sugar and 1 teaspoon salt in a food processor. Pulse several times to mix. Scatter 1 stick (1/2 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/4 -inch pieces, over the dry ingredients. Pulse 5 or 6 times to cut butter in. Fluff with a fork, lifting mixture up from bottom of bowl. Scatter ½ cup cold lard (or nonhydrogenated vegetable shortening), cut into pieces, over the mixture. Pulse 5 or 6 times. Fluff again. Drizzle 1/4 cup cold water over mixture: pulse 5 or 6 times. Fluff again. Sprinkle on ¼ cup more cold water, if needed, Pulse 5 or 6 times more, until clumps

begin to form Dough should look like coarse crumbs. Dump contents into a large bowl. Test the pastry by squeezing some between your fingers. If it seems a little dry and not quite packable, drizzle with 1 teaspoon or so of cold water; work it in with your fingers

Pack the dough into 2 balls, one ball slightly larger than the other. That is your bottom crust. Knead each ball once or twice. Flatten into 3/4-inch thick disks on a lightly floured surface. Wrap each in plastic; refrigerate 1 hour or overnight before roll-

book "Pie: 300 Tried-and-Homemade Pie.'

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berries (1 cup each, sliced), but we choose to use all berries, adding blackber-That recipe includes ries and increasing the amounts of other berries.

fresh rhubarb and straw-

Fresh Tomato Pizza

If you're making it, use whatever fresh tomatoes you have — cherry tomatoes, plum tomatoes, whatever. The flavor will shift slightly with the different tomatoes, but it will be good nonetheless

For the cheese, you'll need a creamy ball of fresh mozzarella. I buy mine at BJ's. They sell a nice, firm fresh mozzarella that's like the hand-pulled kind I used to enjoy when I lived further south. Slice it thinly and then quarter the pieces so it melts evenly. The pizza also has some parmesan on it, which lends a complexity to the flavor and texture of the

A little seasoning — salt, pepper, garlic powder and oregano - round out the

Then bake it. The hot oven will make the crust the tomatoes cook down and cheese melts. It comes out crisp but doughy, savory but with a hint of sweetness from the toma- the Bangor Daily News and

1 ball pizza dough (store bought or homemade) 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil fresh ground pepper, salt and garlic powder 11/2 cup fresh diced tomato

4-5 ounces thinly sliced fresh mozzarella, chopped 1/3 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese Dried oregano

Preheat a pizza stone in an oven set to 500 degrees for 25minutes.

Meanwhile, dust the dough with flour and prepare a surface (a cutting board or pizza paddle) to work. I usually dust the surface with cornmeal but flour works too.

Work the dough into a round disk — about 15 inches in diameter. Place on the prepared surface. Stab the dough all over with the fork and then brush with olive oil.

Sprinkle the dough with salt, pepper and garlic powder.

Spread the tomatoes all over the prepared dough. Top with mozzarella and then parmesan. Sprinkle with oregano, as desired.

hot pizza stone. Bake for 12-16 minutes, or until golden. Remove the

Transfer the pizza to the

pizza from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes before cutting with a pizza cutter.

toes, and oh so cheesy.

Once this pie is baked, it's heavenly to dig into. And it's even better when you can dig into it with your child who helped craft it.

Sarah Walker Caron is the senior features editor for

author of "Grains as Mains: Modern Recipes Using Ancient Grains," available at bookstores everywhere including The Briar Patch and Bull Moose in Bangor. For more delicious recipes, check out Maine Course at mainecourse.bangordaily

