

Garlic scapes come into favor

The garlic scape, an offshoot once tossed away, is a green that's finally having its day

Garlic scapes, the scrapple of vegetables, have gone gourmet.

Scapes are the flowering, curly, central stalk of the garlic plant, and growers snip them off around this time of year so the plant puts energy into the bulb instead of the bud.

After that, scapes used to land in the compost pile - or perhaps on the plate of an especially frugal farmer, the sort who came up with scrapple because he didn't want to let perfectly good hog offal go to waste. At best, scapes might get to round out the farmer's Poke Salad, a dish made with a weed that must be double-boiled because it's full of poison.



Yet lately, scapes are turning up on the pages of glossy food magazines, at farmers' markets and in fancy restaurants.

Because chefs and home cooks alike have started dealing directly with farmers, because recession gardeners appreciate that old everything-but-the-squeal thrift, or simply because those garlicky stalks make a beautiful pea-green pesto, this curlicue's time has come.

"This was packed full today," said Jim Crebs, motioning to a big, near-empty basket at his booth at the Baltimore Farmers' Market under the JFX. Crebs began harvesting scapes a couple of weeks ago at Tomatoes Etc. Produce in Westminster and expected to sell out this week or next. He charges two for \$1.

Scapes seem to be catching on with foodies hungry for something

at once exotic and local.

"If you look at the past with food, the standard 5-by-6 [inch] tomato, the emphasis was on the same size, and same flavor and same texture," said Christian deLutis, chef de cuisine at The Dogwood in Hampden, who uses pureed scapes in place of leeks in vichyssoise. "And now, Americans are willing to eat things that are different looking, that they haven't had before."

At farmers' markets, scapes rate lots of double-takes for the same reason they're nicknamed pigtails: They grow into a loop on one end, like an asparagus spear that's lost its way.

Attracted by the odd shape, Erin Robb of Waverly bought a few from Crebs on a recent Sunday.

"They're interestingly boingy," she said.

Another taker was Kit Wood, a Washington caterer who'd had them before. She was preparing a meal for Friends of the Earth's board meeting. The food had to be good - and local.

"They like to walk their talk," said Wood, who figured she'd use them in a salad.

At his booth, Crebs was in full scape-education mode. He'd posted a sign ("Saute just like onions for a mild garlic taste"), propped a news article on the vegetable next to his basket and - for good measure - stuck a couple of spears into his ball cap.

"Once I break one open and have people smell it, they're pretty much sold," Crebs said.

For kitchen gardeners growing hard-neck garlic, scapes are a bonus crop. (Soft-neck varieties do not produce scapes.)

Vegetable twofers are not unknown. Beets and turnips produce edible greens as well as veggies. But garlic is the rare three-fer - four-fer by some counts.

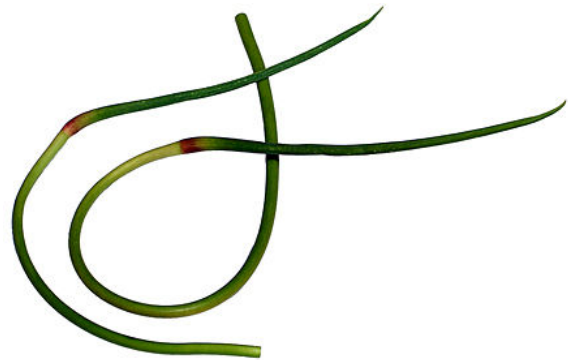
There's the bulb, of course, whose pungent cloves star in hifalutin' aioli and humble garlic bread. And the scapes, which add a more delicate garlic note to salads, stir-fries, soups and sauces. Even the plant's squiggly roots, marketed as "angel hair garlic," have a place at the table. Some restaurants turn them into tempura.

At Dogwood, deLutis dusts the roots in cornstarch and fries them to create a crisp garnish that puts those fake-O canned fried onions to shame.

"The roots are delicious," he said.

Garlic farmer Jack Gurley also uses the hollow garlic leaves, which sprout beside the solid scape portion, in place of green onion tops.

"I don't know any vegetable out there, other than garlic, where you have four options," said Gurley, who enjoys dipping kohlrabi, cut up like carrot sticks, in garlic scape pesto.



Gurley and his wife, Beckie, harvest about 5,000 scapes a year at their Calvert's Gift Farm in Sparks. They distribute some in the weekly deliveries they make to customers who sign up for a season's worth of produce through the farm's Community Supported Agriculture program. They peddle the rest at farmers' markets, including the one in [Catonsville](#), where they've been selling bunches of six for \$2.

"We've been training our [CSA] customers on garlic scapes for a long time," Beckie Gurley said. "Some of them are, 'Oh, my gosh! They're here. I've been waiting all year for them.' "

Even so, the Gurleys are careful about overdosing their CSA members on scapes - or sweet potato leaves, for that matter, even though the couple's children have pronounced the sweetly spinachy leaves "bizarrely good."

"Sweet potato leaves are still a little out there," Jack Gurley said, "like garlic scapes."

There's a green, waste-not satisfaction to eating practically every scrap of a plant. Joan Norman of One Straw Farm in White Hall recalled the African farmer who turned her on to sweet potato leaves. (The leaves of regular spud are poisonous, Norman noted.)

"In my country, we're hungry," the farmer told her.

"Some of these things, you're dumb not to eat them," said Norman, who's also become a big fan of cauliflower and broccoli leaves. "To die for," she said of the latter. "Why would I even bother with broccoli if I can have the leaves?"

But even Norman doesn't make use of every edible bit. She doesn't mess with squash blossoms. "Too hard."

Garlic Scape Pesto

Makes: 8 servings

1/4 pound garlic scapes, chopped into one-inch lengths (seed bulb portion and above discarded)

1/4 cup pine nuts

1/2 cup olive oil

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

3 tablespoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon salt or more to taste

Puree scapes and nuts in a food processor until finely chopped. With the machine running, slowly add the olive oil until smooth. Stir in Parmesan, lemon juice and salt to taste. Serve on bread, crackers or pasta.

Adapted from a recipe by Rita Calvert, which appeared in Edible Chesapeake

Nutrition information

Per serving: 189 calories, 3 grams protein, 18 grams fat, 3 grams saturated fat, 5 grams carbohydrate, trace fiber, 4 milligrams cholesterol, 370 milligrams sodium