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Menu Planning for April: If you're planning your menu for April there are a few holidays to consider and many fresh fruits and vegetables making their entrance for the spring.

Plan for April:

Full Moon on April 15th is called the Pink Moon.
National Garden Month, National Frog Month
and National Poetry month!!

Flowers of April: Daisy and Sweet Pea

- April 7th – World Health Day
- April 15th - Tax Day

- April 15 – 22 Passover
- April 16th - National Eggs Benedict Day
- April 20th - Easter
- April 22nd - Earth Day
- April 25th – Arbor Day

Plan Ahead for May:

Full Moon on May 14th is called the Flower Moon.

May is National BBQ, Egg, Strawberry and Salad Month!!

- May 1st – May Day

- May 5th – Cinco de Mayo
- May 3rd – 140th Kentucky Derby
- May 11th – Mother's Day
- May 18th – 20th – National Restaurant Show, Chicago, IL
- May 26th – Memorial Day observed

- Start adding fresh greens and more herbs to brighten the palate (and the plate!).
- Introduce delicate baby vegetables and petite items to mirror the growing seasons.
- Add early flowers; nasturtiums, pansies, marigold confetti to salads to brighten them up visually and contribute a slight pepper flavor. Baby frills mustard is a delicious addition too.
- Pea tendrils and fava tops (tips) both have a more delicate version of the flavors of the items they'll grow into later in the summer.
- Alliums and fresh legumes become prominent contributors to the menu options.

April is always a little sketchy as spring crops are very weather dependent and don't have a strong hold on the earth yet. Transitions between growing regions add to the confusion and chefs need to be able to be flexible; write specials that can accommodate changes and encourage customers to embrace the season. Wild-craft harvests of Morels, ramps, fiddleheads (the western fiddleheads start mid-March, eastern begin in April) and stinging nettles can add some seasonal splash to the menu. The mid-month is Passover and closes with Easter and Earth Day. On Arbor Day, think of planting a fruit-bearing tree in your green space.

This month is one of the few times that truly delicious sweet peas and carrots are feasible to serve together. The peas are much more delicate than most people believe as they are filled with natural sugars that convert to starch within hours. If they are picked too soon, the inner peas are small and don't have much yield, if they are picked too late, they are large and starchy and not very palatable. But when they are picked just right – what a wonderful spring treat!! Be sure to cook the carrots first and then add the shucked peas at the last moment with a little bit of mint and *fin au beurre* (or finish with butter). If you can't get or keep enough good English Peas in your walk-in, consider using Snap or Snow peas on your menu. A great way to write this as a menu item would be '*legume d'jour*' and then your choices could also include fava beans and fava tips when these delicious green spring veggies become available. (Saison in San Francisco uses this philosophy when they mention *brassicas*.)

April is also the unofficial month of the *allium*. Spring onions, green onions, green garlic, ramps, garlic scapes, baby leeks, chives – all delicious versions of this branch of the lily family. Spring onions can be found red or white, these segue into torpedo onions and Cipolini – combine any of these flavors with delicious oil, thyme and *fleur d’sel*. Roasting only makes these delicious roots richer in flavor, but they are so young and delicate there is not yet a sharp onion flavor (that’s pyloric acid). Think about pickling green onions or baby leeks for a summertime Bloody Mary treat... Green garlic and ramps are wonderful ways to celebrate the season as they are both so fleeting. In New England, a classic combination of flavors is sautéed shad roe and ramps – with maybe a few fiddleheads and morels. Remember the adage – “...if it grows together, it goes together.”

As a chef and a diner, there are two important factors to remember when ordering, prepping and eating these items: Spring products are very delicate - the starches, sugars and flavors can shift quickly depending on when they were harvested and how they are stored; seasonal items are short-lived celebrations of the shift in season, enjoy them when they are available because frozen morels and ramps are poor substitutes for the fresh item.

One final special item that becomes available this month is the green almond. These nuts are generally available through June, when the outer shells become too tough and the center endosperm firms up and solidifies. Fresh green almonds are a Mediterranean delicacy and the combination of fuzzy outer young shell and gelatinous inside is an interesting addition to salads and sauces or stews. The nut provides a light lemon, citrus, grassy flavor and is a great item to chiffonade or thinly slice on a mandolin and add as a unique spring ingredient.

Cherries and other stonefruit should begin in May with earnest

Spring Porcini also become available usually in May....

A good rule of thumb - California Cherries start on Mother’s Day and continue through Father’s Day.

Remember that the items in **BOLD** will prove to usually be better values as they are in their peak harvest or storage period.

Planning for April:

Artichokes

Asparagus

Avocados

Baby Artichokes

Baby Carrots w/ Tops

Baby Mixed Root Vegetables

Beans, Fava

Beans, Fava tips

Beans, Green

Beets

Blossoms, Orange

Blossoms, Lemon

Broccoli

Broccoli Rabe

Cabbage, Napa

Cactus Leaves

Carambola

Cardoon

Carrots

Cauliflower

Celery

Celery Root

Chayote

Cherimoya

Citrus – Blood Oranges

Citrus – Kumquats

Citrus - Grapefruit

Citrus – Meyer Lemon

Corn – new crop Calif.

Cresses

Dandelion

Eggplant

Endive – Belgian

Feijoa

Fennel

Fennel, Bronze

Fennel Pollen

Fiddlehead Fern - Western

Garlic – Elephant

Garlic – Green

Garlic – Scapes

Ginger

Guava

Greens - Dandelion

Greens - Arugula

Hearts of Palm

Horseradish

Jicama

Kiwano Melon

Kohl Rabi

Leeks

Lettuce – Iceberg

Lettuce – Leaf

Lettuce-Baby (all)

Lettuce – Miner's

Lettuce-Spring Mix

Mangoes – Manila

Mangoes, Ataulfo

Merleton (Mirliton)

Mushrooms - Chanterelle

Mushrooms – Morels

Mushrooms - Porcini

Onions – Cipollini

Onions - Young

Oranges – Navel

Oranges – Valencia

Papaya

Passion Fruit

Peas - English

Peas - Sugar Snap

Pea Tendrils

Pears – Bartlett (imports)

Pineapple

Potatoes - Fingerling

Potatoes-Purple

Potatoes-White

Potatoes-Yukon Gold

Raddichio

Rambutan

Ramps

Radishes

Rhubarb - field

Spinach

Spinach - Bloomsdale

Spinach-Baby

Squash - Baby

Squash – Yellow Crookneck

Squash – Zucchini

Stinging Nettle

Star Fruit

Sunchokes

Strawberries

Tamarillo

Turnips

Watercress

Watermelon