

From The Kitchen at St. Francis Friary, Los Angeles

A dear friend of the friary's, Kevin Gunn, sometimes takes me to the Silver Lake Farmers' Market on Saturday mornings after Morning Prayer and Mass. He's very sweet to wait until the friars have finished our Morning Conference meeting. I really appreciate the opportunity to be around farmers who care so much about food and the way it's produced. It does my soul good to walk alongside, even briefly, those who also reverence the gifts offered to us through the earth.

As we approached my favorite vegetable stand one Saturday I saw the most gorgeous, full, deeply colored greens practically beckoning to me. Although I appreciate farming I don't have a green thumb in any way imaginable, so such sights often fill me with awe. I was pleased to see these greens were attached to an equally beautiful – but in a different and earthy way – bunch of beets. I never much cared for beets when I was a child, but now that I think on it most likely that's because often they came out of a can. Fresh beets just taste different. A fact I happily came upon when in the mid-90's I attended Peter Kump's School for Culinary Arts in New York City.

All the way home from the Farmers' Market I kept thinking of what to do with my bounty. I thought I would eat the beets and the greens separately at two different meals, but when I got home and looked around the pantry another idea came to me. Here's what I came up with:

Spaghetti with Roasted Beets and Braised Beet Greens

Preheat your oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove the stems and leaves from one bunch of beets (about 3-4 medium sized beets) and reserve them. Wash the beets well, place them on a sheet of aluminum foil, coat them with oil, and sprinkle them with salt. Seal the beets in the foil and roast them in the preheated oven for about 50 minutes to an hour until they are just tender. Allow them to cool completely, then peel them, cut them into ½ inch cubes, and reserve them.

While the beets are roasting, prepare your mise en place. (I can't help it – I'm a culinary school graduate.) Slice the beet stalks thinly on a severe bias (or a sharp diagonal), making about 1 inch lengths. Slice the beet greens into ¾ inch wide strips. Finely dice half of a medium onion, one carrot, and one stalk of celery. Mince 2 cloves of garlic. Chop 1/3 cup of parsley. Toast and chop ½ a cup of

walnuts. (Optional if one of your guests is allergic, of course.) Prepare 1 cup of vegetable broth, which I do using a vegetarian base from a jar.

Get a pot of water on to boil and cook 1 ½ pounds of spaghetti. While that's happening, in a large pan over medium high heat sauté the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic in 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Season with salt and pepper and when the onions go translucent after about 5 minutes, stir in the beet stalks. After 3 minutes add the beet greens and season with some salt and pepper, a teaspoon of dried thyme, and a pinch of crushed red pepper flakes. When the greens wilt add 1/3 cup of white wine or dry sherry. Allow this to boil for 2 minutes, then add the cup of vegetable broth. Bring this to a boil and then reduce the heat to simmer for about 5 minutes or until the beet greens and stalks are tender.

Adjust the seasoning. Note that you may need to add a pinch of sugar to help balance the acidity of the alcohol. If you're not serving a vegan, which I was when I put this dish together, you can also accomplish this balancing act by adding a tablespoon or two of unsalted butter and/or stirring in some grated parmesan cheese.

Next, stir in about a third of the reserved roasted beets. Toss in the cooked 1 ½ pounds of spaghetti, the reserved half cup of walnuts (if using), and half of the reserved chopped parsley. Toss these together well with a pair of tongs. Transfer this to a big serving dish, sprinkle on the remaining parsley, and top with the remaining roasted beets. A light drizzle of extra virgin olive oil would also be good to finish the dish. Serve with grated parmesan on the side.

Along with a green salad this amount of pasta served 4 hungry friars, but I bet this meal would feed 6 normal folks. The color is amazing! The spaghetti turns a pink/orange hue, which might be a little much for some folks but I think is just fun. A wonderful, hearty, cold-weather dish.

Enjoy!

~Br. Simon