



## Popeye Power from Prince Edward County



Vicki Emlaw delivers organic spinach to Harvest Restaurant in Picton, Prince Edward County, Ontario. Not just any spinach, but hand-picked, just minutes before Vicki Emlaw made the delivery.

You know you're in another place when you turn off County Road 13 in Prince Edward County, Ont. and start down Morrison Point Road. Huge maples form a canopy over the road. There's a peace about the place that makes you feel like you've arrived.

And you have. Just ahead, the sign for Vicki's Veggies. The pretty one-room white frame building, in times past the local post office stands by the road, welcoming visitors to come in to check out what Vicki's got in her freezer and fridge, or dried and preserved on the shelves. Rather more than your regular roadside stand

The sign outside Vicki's Veggies announces what's fresh - in this case foraged wild leeks, aka ramps.

Outside, an array of whatever's in season - not much in early spring, but later, some of the 100 varieties of heirloom tomatoes she and her partner Tim Noxon grow from seed, or ground cherries, spinach, sorrel, asparagus, wild leeks or peppers. When Vicki's around, she'll help you make your choice and take your money. And when she's not, because the farm is the source of boxed vegetables that go out weekly to members of Community Supported (Shared) Agriculture (CSA), local restaurants like



Harvest in Picton, and the passing public, Vicki and Tim are out in the fields - just drop your money into the cigar tin.

Wild leeks grow in shady parts of the bush. If you buy a bunch like this one with freshly dug roots, plant a few in a shady part of your garden, even your flowerbeds, and you will soon be able to harvest your own "wild" leeks.

When I visited the farm 10 days ago, the trees were barely budding, and activity in the garden centred around snappy stalks of asparagus and lemony sorrel. From the bush, came wild leeks for the stand. But



in the greenhouses, thousands of heirloom tomato seedlings were growing their second set of leaves. By the upcoming Victoria Day weekend, the tomato plants will be ready to graduate to the outdoors. May 16 and 17 and May 23 and 24 between 10 am and 5 pm, the sale of heirloom tomato seedlings takes place. There are over 100 varieties of tomatoes, and be warned, it's first come, first served. An assortment of other vegetables, herbs and tree seedlings complement the tomatoes.

If you miss the sale, and want to plant heirloom tomatoes next year, circle the upcoming Labour Day weekend when Vicki's Veggies has its annual tomato tasting. Then next year, you'll know which tomato you really loved - and be there in time.

But, back briefly to the spinach Vicki was personally carrying to chef Michael Potters at Harvest Restaurant. In all the excitement of local asparagus, red-tipped leaf lettuce and chives, something as basic as spinach can go unnoticed. But not here. A favourite recipe came to mind when I got home and found some pretty decent looking organic spinach. Not Vicki's - but not bad.

### **Wilted Spinach with Currants, Pine Nuts and Garlic Croutes**

This robust combination of greens, pine nuts, garlic and currants is popular all around the Mediterranean, and gives a new twist to something to nibble on with a glass of wine. Plan on a selection of olives, multicoloured cherry tomatoes and a chunk of feta to serve with. The super-crunchy croutes are one-bite, so choose a slim baguette, or cut baguette slices in half. There's another way to serve the spinach - as a side dish with roasted or grilled fish, chicken or pork.

1/4 cup (50 mL) currants or 1/3 cup (75 mL) golden raisins

5 anchovy fillets

8 cups (2 L) packed spinach leaves, 10 oz/284 g

20 thin slices baguette

5 large cloves garlic, minced

1/4 tsp (1 mL) each salt and freshly ground pepper

1/3 cup (75 mL) extra virgin olive oil

1/3 cup (75 mL) pine nuts or slivered almonds

Half lemon

.In small bowl, cover currants with boiling water; soak for 15 minutes. Drain and set aside. Meanwhile, soak anchovies in cold water for 10 minutes; drain, pat dry and chop finely. Set aside.

. Wash spinach, trimming stems if necessary; shake off excess water. Place in large heavy-bottomed saucepan. Cover and cook over medium-high heat until wilted, turning 2 or 3 times, about 4 minutes. Drain in a sieve and let cool; press out excess liquid. Chop coarsely; set aside.

The spinach has cooked barely 4 minutes, just enough to wilt the leaves, but not fade its bright green colour.

. Arrange bread slices in single layer on large rimmed baking sheet. In large clean saucepan, warm garlic, salt and pepper in the oil over low heat until oil is fragrant, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat; lightly brush oil over the bread. Bake bread slices in 350°F (180°F) oven until crisp and golden, 10 to 15 minutes.



The garlic and olive-oil toasted baguette slices (croutes) are also delicious with soup. For this test, I heated part of the oil, garlic and seasonings separately, but it makes more sense to heat all the oil, garlic and seasonings together, and simply brush the oil from the pan. One less dish to wash up!



Spread pine nuts on small rimmed baking sheet; toast in 350°F. (180°C) oven until golden, about 3 to 5 minutes. (Watch the pine nuts carefully as they go from pale to too dark in a flash.) Set aside.

. Set garlic and oil mixture over medium heat; fry, stirring until garlic is tender, about 2 minutes. Add anchovies; mash until fairly smooth and hot. Add spinach and currants; toss together and cook, tossing often, until spinach is well coated and hot. Spoon into warmed small serving platter; squeeze lemon juice over the spinach. Sprinkle with pine nuts and surround with croutes.



Spoon the spinach onto a croute - fancy word for toasted bread, and enjoy as an appetizer, or skip the bread feature and side the delicious spinach with grilled or roasted fish, chicken or pork.

. Makes 6 servings.

Tip: To make up to 2 hours ahead, prep all the ingredients up to the point of adding the cooked spinach to the olive oil. Refrigerate the chopped anchovies and chopped cooked spinach. Cover remaining ingredients and leave at room temperature.

Vicki's Veggies: [www.vickisveggies.com](http://www.vickisveggies.com)

Harvest Restaurant: [www.harvestrestaurant.ca](http://www.harvestrestaurant.ca)

