Tuv Ha'Aretz CSA at the Forest Hills Jewish Center

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TUV HASHAVUA: Best of the Week

"Green" for a Mean Clean

by Natalie Zych

When I first became interested in the ingredients used in beauty products, I also began questioning what our household cleaning products really contained. More importantly, I wondered why were we using products loaded with headache-inducing fragrances? Habits can be hard to break though, and it took my mother and me some time to transition to effective substitutions. The long process included trying out and judging the products, as well as researching and locating them. I'm happy to have found products that have successfully replaced traditional laundry detergent, bathroom tub and tile cleaner, and dishwasher soap in our house. I hope my findings help you, too.

In dealing with alternative products of any sort, beware of "green-washing." This term refers to the often false claims made regarding the toxicity of products, which can lead consumers to believe that so-and-so company's products are cleaner or more eco-friendly than traditional products; in reality they are often no different. It is important to do your own research on everything you buy and use. I use the EWG (Environmental Working Group, ewg.org) database – it has been invaluable in my ongoing journey to reduce and replace the potentially toxic products kept beneath the sink and inside bathroom cabinets.

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Bahay Kubo

by Manisha Shah-Balangon

Lately my mother has been singing the Filipino folk song, *Bahay Kubo*, to my 1-year-old daughter. It's not a song I recall her singing to me or my brothers when we were little, so I had to ask her about the lyrics. And since my darling daughter seems to drift off to sleep so easily with my mom (a grandmother's magical touch honed over a lifetime – I've got a long way to go!), it was clear that I needed to learn how to sing the song myself.

When I learned that the lyrics are about the vegetables that grew around a little *nipa* hut (a small, one-room round hut, usually lifted up off the ground by stilts), it reminded me of all the delicious Filipino dishes that I grew up with and sometimes crave today.

Filipino cuisine is a blend of Spanish and Asian cooking with flavors that combine sour, sweet, and salty palates, and dishes are mostly served with rice. These dishes highlight vegetables in ways that are very unlike those I come across here in the US, and a lot of these vegetables are the same as those we have received in our weekly boxes. Gourds and greens alike are often boiled in a savory, tangy broth or stew that incorporates poultry, beef, seafood, and pork. These broths commonly use ginger, garlic, and even coconut milk as part of the base.

Two vegetables that I have yet to see from our CSA are the Asian Long Bean and the Bitter Melon.

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THE AUTHORS:

Natalie Zych is an aspiring physical therapist who loves to work out, learn acoustic guitar, and read fiction in her spare time.

Manisha Shah-Balangon is a mom of 3, a daughter of immigrants, an industrial engineer, and a happy home cook. For fun she usually throws everything into a pot to see what bubbles up. Manisha thanks her husband Jonathan for helping with the CSA pickups.

Winter Pick-up Schedule

- 1/28
- 2/18
- 3/11

Jan 28, 2013 | Shevat 27, 5774

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

1/28 Pick-up

Early Shift

Irene Chung
Nina Lincoln

Late Shift

Jennie Badler
Raymond Kimmelman-DeVries

Food Bank Delivery:
Lauren Griffiths

Share your recipes, tips and ideas : Yahoo Listserv and Facebook!

PLEASE BRING YOUR EXTRA PLASTIC BAGS TO PICK-UP FOR OTHERS TO USE.

NO CAYUGA PICK-UPS THIS WINTER

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WEBSITES:

- **FHJC:** www.fhjc.org
- **Hazon:** www.hazon.org
- **Golden Earthworm:** www.goldenearthworm.squarespace.com
- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/tuvFHJC
- **Yahoo Listserv:** groups.yahoo.com/group/TuvForAllFHJC
- **Twitter:** twitter.com/#!/tuvfhjc

1/28: WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

Sweet Potatoes
Watermelon Radishes
White or Yellow Potatoes
Beets
Carrots
Rutabagas

Cont'd "Bahay Kubo"

The Asian Long Bean (also known as Asparagus Bean or Yard Long Bean) can be found in Asian groceries. It's typically about 18 inches or more in length and a darker green color than our common green beans, with a thicker skin that helps to prevent them from becoming mushy after longer periods of boiling. The Bitter Melon is, as its name suggests, an acquired taste. It is a gourd, similar in weight and shape to a cucumber, with a lighter green color, a bumpy, edible skin and inedible seeds. It is featured in a very popular Filipino vegetable dish, Pinakbet, usually along with tomatoes, okra, eggplant and squash. The vegetables are the stars, but it is not always a vegetarian dish. Sometimes meat or seafood is sautéed along with a salty, fermented paste (called *bagoong*) to provide the umami flavor to the vegetables.

Although the climate across most of the Philippines tends towards the tropical instead of the temperate, I find Filipino cooking to be rich and very hearty and homey – my kind of comfort food.

Cont'd "Green for a Mean Clean" ....

Laundry: the Power of Soap Nuts

I purchased laundry detergents produced by Seventh Generation and by Sun & Earth. These worked well, but I could not find information on what the plant-based surfactants in the ingredients were and was dismayed by the high prices. So I decided to try "soap nuts."

Soap nuts /soapberries are fruits of *Sapindaceae* in the Lychee family. The pulp contains saponin, a substance that lathers when mixed with water. I was skeptical as to whether these dried chestnut-sized balls could release enough soap to clean adequately, and was surprised to find that our laundry came out clean and smelling fresh. For whites we add a bit of Borax to brighten our load. Soap nuts can be reused multiple times and are biodegradable so you can throw them in your compost bin once they've served their purpose. The brand I purchased, Eco Nuts, includes tips for optimal usage, such as soaking the soap nuts in water before adding to a heavily soiled load of laundry. Overall, I am very pleased by the results.

Shiny Tubs and Clean Plates

When it came to bathroom products, I researched several DIY recipes for tub and toilet cleaners. Honestly, I am not a fan of DIY projects and making my own mixes seemed intimidating. I had tried scrubbing our tub with baking soda but was unhappy with the process.

Ultimately we consulted EWG for suggestions and chose the Seventh Generation Natural Tub & Tile Cleaner, Emerald Cypress & Fir, with an "A" rating. We like the spray format and how it requires just the right amount of elbow grease to get our tub and sink free of soap scum.

For the kitchen, I tested Seventh Generation: Free & Clear and Sun & Earth brands. Both required dilution, but I found I was using a lot of the Sun & Earth detergent, and even when diluted, the Free & Clear did a better job on my dishes. However, the EWG database gave it only a "C" rating, so I am not giving it my full endorsement. Interestingly, I think that changing the way I do dishes – namely by soaking them before scrubbing with a sponge – produced the best results.

In the future, I hope to conquer my DIY phobia and transition toward making my own cleaning products!

Pinakbet

Manisha Shah-Balangon | Serves 4 to 6

1/4 lb beef or other meat, cut into small cubes (This recipe traditionally uses pork belly. Omit meat if preferred)
3 tbsp cooking oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 tbsp ginger, minced
3-4 cloves garlic, crushed
3 medium tomatoes, cut to 1" chunks
2 tbsp fish sauce or other salty condiment (This recipe traditionally uses 4 tbsp shrimp paste; it's a very strong taste, use less for a milder flavor)
1 cup water
1 medium bitter melon, sliced lengthwise in half, seeds removed, 1/8" half-moon slices (Use less or omit if preferred)
1/4 lb thin-skinned squash, 1" cubes
1 bunch long beans, 3" lengths
6 to 8 pieces okra, tops trimmed
1 large or 2 medium Asian eggplants, skin on, 1" cubes
salt and pepper, to taste

Heat oil in a large skillet or pot. Sauté the ginger, onion, and tomato to make a sofrito. Add the garlic last as it tends to brown quickly.

Cook the meat (if using) till lightly browned (about 5-8 minutes). Add fish sauce or salty condiment and cook to incorporate, about 2 minutes.

Add water and bring to a simmer. Cook 15 minutes or till meat is tender. Add squash and cook 5-7 minutes, then the long beans and bitter melon and cook for another 2-3 minutes.

Add remaining ingredients and stir. Simmer for 5 minutes till cooked through. Don't overcook okra and eggplant, or they get mushy. Serve hot over steamed brown or white rice.

TWO POTATO MINNESOTA MASH
***Roseroberta Pauling** (who was snowed in!)*

Clean and cut into chunks 1 sweet potato and 1 white potato and boil them, while in a small frying pan put a tablespoon each of butter and coconut oil. Chop up 1 medium-sized garlic clove, 3 green onions, a handful each of cilantro and dill. Put into the oil and let it simmer a bit. When potatoes are done, drain, and add to the pan along with some Celtic salt and cayenne to taste. Mash the potatoes leaving some lumps. To reheat: place in a baking dish in the oven at 250°F… delicious!