
COOKING FRESH



Fall is a special time for produce in the Valley. In September, the new planting cycle continues and at the end of the month the first of the season's baby vegetables make their debut. Look for tiny carrots, slender green onions, delicate radishes and miniature turnips. Our seasonal farmers' markets reopen in October after the long, hot summer and pumpkins abound at the Valley's farm events (call Schnepf Farms, Mother Nature's Farm and Tolmachoff Farms for their seasonal schedules.) In November, as the heat of summer finally dissipates, greens such as lettuces, arugula, collards, kale and spinach flourish. Key limes arrive for their short season, heralding the start of the Valley citrus harvest.

This is harvest time for the native foods planted during the monsoon including tepary beans, squash and melons. The last of the red, ripe prickly pear fruits are collected for their magenta juice.

NOW IN SEASON

Arugula
Basil
Beets
Bok choy and other Asian greens
Carrots
Chard
Chiles
Cilantro
Cucumbers
Dates
Eggplant
Figs
Gourds
Green beans
Green onions
(bunching onions and l'ittoi)
Kale
(Tuscan and Russian)
Key limes
Lettuce
(baby mix and other varieties)
Peppers
Radishes
Spinach
Tomatoes
Turnips
Winter squash
(spaghetti, acorn, butternut, etc.)
Zucchini

POSSIBILITIES

This recipe is traditionally made with Spanish chorizo which is a hard sausage. We've substituted local Mexican chorizo for a Southwestern twist.

CHORIZO-STUFFED DATES

1/2 pound bulk chorizo
1/3 cup breadcrumbs, preferably fresh
36 whole dates (with pits*)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat a medium skillet over medium heat and, when hot, add the chorizo. Cook for 5 to 6 minutes, stirring several times. Then transfer the chorizo to a cool bowl and stir in the breadcrumbs.

Meanwhile, use a paring knife to make a lengthwise slice down the top of each date. Remove the pit. You should end up with dates that you can open up, somewhat like a book. Spoon 1/2 teaspoon of the chorizo mixture into each date and close it back up.

Spread the stuffed dates out on a baking sheet and bake at 375 degrees for 9-10 minutes. Serve warm, not hot, as the sugars in the dates can become molten as they heat up. Makes 36.

***Note:** *It's better to use unpitted dates for this recipe. When you remove the pit, there's a small chamber that's easier to fill with the chorizo than the sometimes-gummy insides of a pre-pitted date.*

Recipe courtesy of Andy Broder, AndyFood, a culinary studio, 7000 East Shea Boulevard Suite 1740, Scottsdale, (480) 951-2400. This recipe will be featured in a Simple Holiday Hors d'Oeuvres class in October.

