



MASTERING THE ART OF  
**SOUTHERN VEGETABLES**  
— & —  
DUPREE *and* GRAUBART

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**SOUTHERN VEGETABLES**  
NATHALIE DUPREE  
*and*  
CYNTHIA GRAUBART






# CONTENTS



Foreword . . . . .	7	Eggplant . . . . .	90
Introduction . . . . .	9	Garlic . . . . .	95
General Vegetable Information . . . . .	12	Greens . . . . .	96
Globe Artichokes . . . . .	14	Mushrooms . . . . .	108
Jerusalem “Sunchoke” Artichokes . . . . .	18	Okra . . . . .	113
Asparagus . . . . .	20	Onions, Leeks, and Shallots . . . . .	126
Beans and Peas . . . . .	26	Bell Peppers . . . . .	135
Beets . . . . .	45	Potatoes . . . . .	138
Broccoli . . . . .	49	Summer Squash . . . . .	155
Brussels Sprouts . . . . .	56	Winter Squash . . . . .	165
Cabbage . . . . .	60	Sweet Potatoes . . . . .	167
Carrots . . . . .	65	Tomatoes . . . . .	173
Cauliflower . . . . .	70	Turnips . . . . .	190
Celery . . . . .	75	Vinaigrettes & Sauces . . . . .	193
Corn . . . . .	78	Roasting Vegetables . . . . .	199
Cucumbers . . . . .	88	Index . . . . .	201



Golden Vidalia Onion Tart  
with Olives and Rosemary

## Golden Vidalia Onion Tart with Olives and Rosemary

MAKES 1 (8- OR 9-INCH) TART

Vidalia onions are amazingly versatile—our Georgia Vidalias being among the world's sweetest onions—and they make for a satisfying tart. But any onion will do—even red ones. I also make this free-form, just because it's faster and easier, and no special equipment, like a tart pan with removable bottom, is required. Try experimenting with shapes like rectangles and squares so guests don't just think it is an onion pizza but something extraordinarily special, which it is.

**1 (8- or 9-inch) piecrust,  
homemade or store-bought**

**2–3 medium onions, preferably  
Vidalia, sliced 1/2 inch thick**

**Salt**

**2–3 tablespoons butter or oil**

**1 cup grated Gruyère, Cheddar,  
or soft goat cheese**

**1–2 sprigs fresh rosemary,  
leaves stripped and chopped**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1/2 cup Greek or other black  
olives**

Prebake the piecrust in an 8- or 9-inch tart pan, and set aside to cool.

Meanwhile, prepare the onions. Heat the butter in a large heavy skillet and cook the onions slowly over low heat, stirring frequently, until they are caramelized and deep mahogany brown. This should take about 30 minutes.

Layer the onions and cheese into the tart crust, beginning with the onions and ending with a generous topping of the cheese. Sprinkle with rosemary and pepper. Lay the olives on a counter and smack them with the side of a large knife to loosen the pits. Remove the pits, slice or chop the olives as desired, and sprinkle them on top of the rosemary and cheese. Move to a rimmed baking sheet.

When ready to bake, preheat oven to 400 degrees. Bake 10 to 20 minutes, or until cheese is melted and the crust is a solid brown. Remove from oven. Serve hot or cold.



### STORING ONIONS

In recent years, the sweet Georgia Vidalia onion has been joined by Texas Sweets, Walla Wallas, and other onions developed for their sweetness and mild flavor. I particularly like them caramelized, as they are mellow than other onions.

Many Southerners purchase sweet Vidalia onions in 25-pound sacks. To feast on them all year round, keep the onions in a pair of clean pantyhose, knotting between each onion. The point is to keep the onions from rubbing together and potentially rotting at the point of contact. As the onions are bred smaller, they fit nicely into the toe.

## ASPARAGUS

When the first asparagus pokes its head up in the Lowcountry, we know it is spring. The newer varieties in the early twenty-first century include slender purple or green stalks as long as a forearm and as thin as a pencil. They are so sweet they can pleausurably be eaten raw, although rarely are.

One amazing thing about asparagus is how many personalities it has. Whether crisply cool, subtly room temperature, or hot and dripping with butter or sauce, it adds grace and refinement to a meal. While asparagus comes in many sizes, we prefer the thin, finger-size ones. If using the thin ones, allow more stalks per person. They cook quickly and are often eaten with the fingers. Larger asparagus need peeling and are best cooked standing up in a tall poacher—much like an old-time metal coffee pot—the theory being that the stems cook in the water while the tips steam.

When purchasing asparagus ahead of time, keep the stem ends moist by standing upright in about a half-inch of water in the refrigerator

or lying on the refrigerator shelf in a plastic bag with the ends wrapped in wet paper towels.

Cooked asparagus can be refrigerated and served cold at a later time, or quickly heated in a microwave or under a broiler and served as a hot vegetable to accompany a meal. If not using the cooked asparagus within a few days, freeze in plastic ziplock bags. Thaw and reheat when needed. Tightly wrapped, cooked asparagus can be kept frozen for up to 3 months. It will lose its crunch but will be fine for soup or a casserole.

### EATING ASPARAGUS

Traditionally, and according to Emily Post, asparagus is a finger food. Cooked properly rather than overcooked, it is still crisp and difficult to cut, shooting across the table if attempted. Cook only until its stem has the slightest bend—a decided droop is far too much. Sautéed asparagus is handled with individual asparagus tongs, or hot damp cloths are passed to clean any messy fingers after eating.

### ASPARAGUS IN SOUTHERN HISTORY

Asparagus is a fascinating vegetable to grow. Some varieties take up to 7 years to poke their first wispy shoots up above the ground. Once up, however, they grow rapidly, and the gardener fears going away for a few days lest they have grown and gone. South Carolina was at one time a major grower and supplier of asparagus.

In a 1795 issue of *London Magazine*, the author writes that along the Georgia coast, “the good Indians regaled us and for Greens, boiled us the Tops of China-lirons, which eat almost as well as Asparagus.” In *Charleston Receipts*, the recipe for “Chaney Brin” calls for 2 bunches of Chaney brin (wild asparagus), cooking them as one would fresh asparagus. The top of a wild bush, Chaney brins were considered an early substitute for asparagus.

“Sparrow Grass” was asparagus in the eighteenth century in both England and America. “Spruce,” the first thinning of the growing asparagus, is the long-awaited sign of spring.



## Sautéed Zucchini or Squash Blossoms

SERVES 4

Yellow squash and zucchini, like okra, have particularly tasty blossoms. The male flowers do not traditionally bear any “fruit,” but they are mouthwatering stuffed and deep-fried in a batter or used as a pretty, flavorful garnish. The female flowers can be distinguished by the tiny vegetable protruding from the base of the flower. The flower withers as the fruit grows.

2 tablespoons butter

1 teaspoon oil

1 pint (about 12) zucchini flower blossoms, lightly rinsed and dried

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme or basil

Heat the butter and oil in a large skillet. When hot, add the squash flowers and cook, without browning, for just a few minutes, turning until they puff or burst into full blossoms. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and herbs. Serve immediately. The blossoms will deflate when removed from the heat.

### Variation: Batter-sautéed Zucchini or Squash Blossoms

Use the batter for Stuffed Zucchini blossoms, below, and fry as directed.



### CHIFFONADE

To chiffonade is to roll into several layers and cut into very thin strips, as with greens or basil. Stack washed and drained greens. Roll into a cigar shape. Lay flat on the board and slice horizontally 1/4 inch thick, or thinner for herbs.

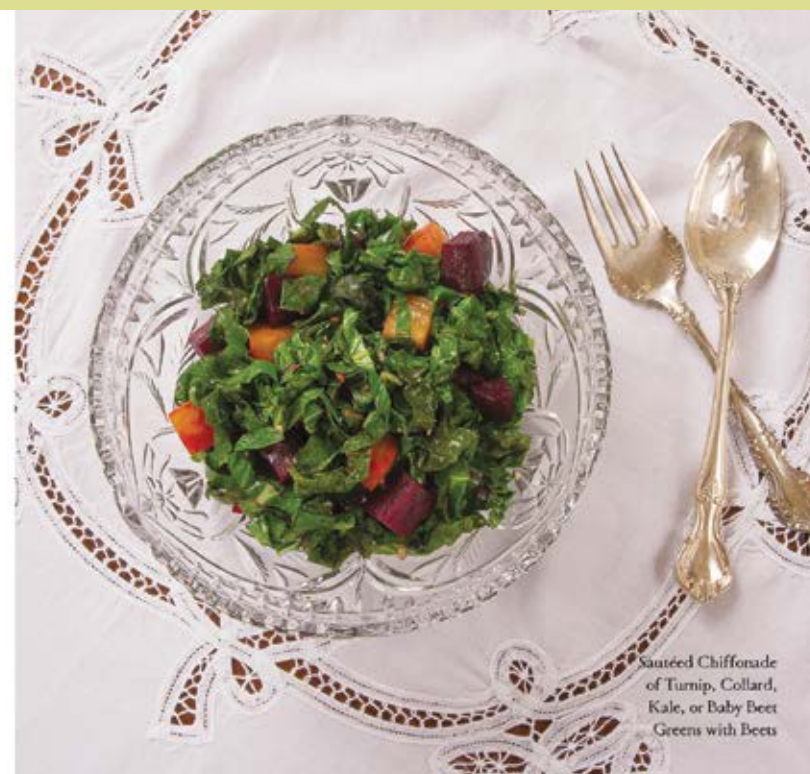
## Sautéed Chiffonade of Turnip, Collard, Kale, or Baby Beet Greens with Beets

SERVES 4 TO 6

New, less bitter varieties of greens developed in the last twenty years, as well as recent use of smaller and younger greens, have led to exciting, dashing dishes like this. Beet, plain or red kale, turnip or collard greens all work singly or together. If very large or tough greens are all that is available, blanch in boiling water for 1 to 2 minutes, drain, and proceed.

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|--|---|
| 1 pound greens, washed (page xxx)      | 1 pound cooked beets or 1 (8-ounce) can beets, drained and coarsely chopped |
| 2 teaspoons butter or oil              | 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice or cider vinegar                 |
| 2 garlic cloves, chopped               | Salt  |
| 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh ginger | Freshly ground black pepper   |

Remove stems of greens if necessary and chiffonade the greens. Melt the butter in a large skillet and add the chiffonaded greens, garlic, and ginger. Cover and cook until the greens are wilted, just a few minutes. Stir in the chopped beets and lemon juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Heat through for 1 to 2 minutes and serve hot or at room temperature.



Sautéed Chiffonade of Turnip, Collard, Kale, or Baby Beet Greens with Beets