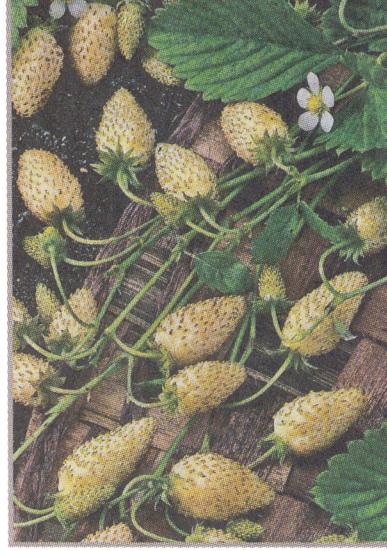


# Los Angeles Times

# FOOD

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

latimes.com/food



*Floragraphics*  
HEY, ARE THOSE ... ? Yellow Wonder strawberries on the vine.

## KITCHEN GARDENER

# Yellow berries and pink pumpkins

By DAWNA NOLAN

Special to The Times

IT'S a great time of year for kitchen gardeners. Good rains mean great greens, and we've been happily tracking muddy footprints into the house as we bring in fresh-cut large-leaf mâché or Italian wild arugula. At the same time, we're thinking about what to plant for spring and summer harvesting.

For near-immediate gratification, plant radishes and spring onions right away as well as another round of lettuces and greens. Try one of the several radicchio varieties available as seedlings from Windrose Farm of Paso Robles at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market on Wednesdays. Barbara Spencer, owner, says she has some great chicory varieties ready to plant.

Not quite as fast-growing, but an indispensable part of spring harvests, are fragrant strawberries. For the happy surprise of them, and for what many say is an even sweeter taste than the red, try Yellow Wonder, a yellow alpine strawberry from Swallowtail Garden Seeds in Santa Rosa.

The next several weeks are also great for planting herbs. Italian Cameo basil, new from Renee Sheppard's Renee's Garden Seeds in Felton, has big leaves that will make as much pesto as you can eat, but is a compact 8 inches tall, nice for an edging plant in [See Garden, Page F6]

## ON THE SIDE

# Savoring time in a bottle

By MATTHEW STRAUS

Special to The Times

PICTURE a few people at a table in a restaurant or at home, with sumptuous food on the way, getting ready to pull a cork on a good, 10-year-old bottle of Côtes du Rhône.

First we anticipate the wine (I've included myself in the gathering — who wouldn't?), bought five years ago but approaching its prime now. Then we pour and take our first smells from the glass. Then the first sips, and then, on our own time, as the evening progresses and the wine relaxes, we might consciously or unconsciously take a dreamy wander through a vineyard on a warm September afternoon in 1998, when the guy who made this wine was [See Wine, Page F7]



LORI SHEPLER Los Angeles Times  
MIX 'N' MATCH: Chef Takashi Abe's dishes include miso cod.

## THE REVIEW

# O.C. variety show

S. Irene Virbila finds a zillion creative choices at Izakaya Zero in Huntington Beach. Page 9

A culinary aristocrat arrives from Burgundy, recipes and all.



AL SEIB Los Angeles Times  
EXPLORING: Anne Willan's first visit to Santa Monica Farmers' Market. Below, leeks vinaigrette is from one of her books.

# Her movable feast hits L.A.

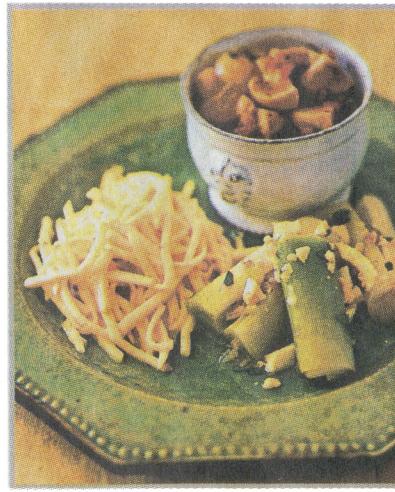
By RUSS PARSONS  
Times Staff Writer

ANNE WILLAN is shopping at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market when out of the blue an attractive young woman comes up to introduce herself. "I met you at a Les Dames [d'Escoffier] dinner," she says earnestly. "I just wanted to say how glad I am that you joined our market."

Willan, perfectly coiffed and slightly regal in a well-tailored wool suit even at this early hour, thanks her politely, then, after the woman has walked away, turns and asks with a slightly quizzical look: "That was nice, wasn't it?"

If she seems a little taken aback, it's certainly not because of being recognized — Willan has been a guiding force in the cooking world for decades — rather, it is probably the very Californian form the greeting took.

Willan has made her home in Los Angeles just since Christmas, and you get the sense that after 25 years of living in a château in the French country- [See Willan, Page F4]



FRANCE RUFFENACH

# The changing flavors of a life

[Willan, from Page F1]

side, this very proper English-woman may still be feeling a bit like a duck out of water in Southern California.

Though she may not have the instant name recognition of a Rachael Ray or Mario Batali, Willan's influence on the food world has been profound. Her La Varenne cooking school in Burgundy has long been regarded as one of the finest in the world. She has a Lifetime Achievement award from the International Assn. of Culinary Professionals, is a Grande Dame of Les Dames d'Escoffier International and has been named to the Australian World Food Media Awards Hall of Fame.

She's written at least a couple dozen well-received cookbooks (even she doesn't know the exact number), including two that have become culinary bibles: "La Varenne Pratique" and "French Regional Cooking." Willan's books have been published in 24 countries and translated into 18 languages. Her most recent, "The Country Cooking of France," came out in September.

## Storybook heroine

**B**UT last fall, Willan and her husband, Mark Cherniavsky, in the wake of health problems he suffered, decided to leave the French countryside and join their daughter Emma Cherniavsky and her husband, Todd Schulkin, here.

Many people go through a downsizing at a certain point in their lives, but few do it quite as dramatically as Willan has. In December, she and Cherniavsky packed up their 18-bedroom, 17th century château in Burgundy and moved to a two-bedroom apartment in Marina del Rey.

Granted, that's only temporary quarters until they have finished remodeling their new home, a very nice Leave-It-to-Beaver-ish two-story in Santa Monica, but ... well, their last home was the Château du Fey.

It's the latest chapter in a life that reads like something out of fiction. In fact, it's easy to see Willan as a Jane Austen character grown up. She's attractive, but not in a shiny way; she's smart, and she's strong of character.

She has a story worthy of an Austen heroine as well. A daughter of privilege, Willan turned her back on the comfortable life planned for her to follow her heart (both personally and professionally) and wound up not only living at Versailles, but also owning her own château in France.

Indeed, even a writer as spirited as Austen might have had trouble inventing this story. Raised in a wealthy family in Yorkshire, she graduated from Cambridge in 1959 with a master's degree in economics. She still speaks in a polished English accent that lends everything she says a note of gravitas (and that makes her dry sense of humor crackle once you've caught on).

Encouraged by an early employer while teaching at a finishing school, she took classes at London's famed Cordon Bleu cooking school. "That changed everything," Willan says. "Once I did that, I never wanted to do anything else. When I found cooking, it was decided for me. I just had to do it."

With her parents' begrudging support after graduating from that school she went to Paris to finish her studies, earning the coveted Grand Diplôme in 1963.

On a small inheritance, she moved into an even smaller apartment and put an ad in the International Herald Tribune: "Cordon Bleu cook will give lessons and cook for dinner parties." There were six replies, she recalls, including "one from a gentleman who wanted me to cook 'intimate dinner parties' in his suite." She chuckles at the memory.

## Versailles attic

**A**TTRACTIVE as that offer might have been, there was another even better. It came scrawled on heavily embossed stationery from the Château de Versailles. Willan remembers that it said, "I have Mexican cooks. I am starting to entertain at the Château de Versailles so I want my cooks to learn French cooking. Please come to see me."

The note was from the American-born philanthropist and socialite Florence van der Kemp, who had recently married her third husband, the curator of Versailles (not satisfied with restoring that palace, the couple later went on to fix up Monet's gardens at Giverny).

Willan started out by giving twice-a-week cooking classes and wound up living at Versailles, albeit in an attic over the



**OLD HOUSE:** Anne Willan lived in and ran her cooking school La Varenne from the 18-bedroom, 17th century Château du Fey in Burgundy, France.



**NEW HOUSE:** The kitchen of Willan's new home in Santa Monica will be outfitted for teaching as well as home cooking.



**TATIN:** An upside-down apple tart, from a Willan cookbook.

servants' quarters.

While working for Van der Kemp, Willan cooked for the duke and duchess of Windsor, Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco and the flamboyant Countess Mapie de Toulouse-Lautrec, a cookbook author in her own right, who pointed out that Willan seemed to have thickened her luncheon *boeuf à la mode en gelée* with gelatin rather than pure veal stock. "I blushed," Willan remembers, "but fortunately only she and I understood the nuance of what she said."

Another dinner party guest was Cherniavsky, a young World Bank economist. The two fell in love, and when Cherniavsky was transferred to Washington, D.C., a year later, Willan followed him, moving to New York. There, with the help of Van der Kemp, she secured a job as an editor at Gourmet magazine. A year later, she and Cherniavsky were married and she moved to Washington to become the food editor of the now-defunct Washington Star newspaper.

For the next decade, they bounced back and forth between the U.S. and France. While Cherniavsky worked for World Bank, she taught cooking and wrote — typically for the serious-minded Willan, her fledg-

ling effort in the cookbook world was editing Cordon Bleu's 20-volume Grand Diplôme Cooking Course encyclopedia.

In 1975 she opened La Varenne in Paris. In 1982, she and Cherniavsky bought Château du Fey, near the town of Joigny in Burgundy. And in 1991 they moved the school there. Her intention for La Varenne, she says, was to offer the culinary equivalent of a college education.

"I wanted [the students] to go away

looking at food in a different way," she says. "It was a direct outcome of the habits of analysis one is taught at a good university. I wanted them to go away from a dish thinking about what the tastes had been and how the chefs had gotten them, where the ingredients had come from, what the background of the food was, what the chef had been trying to do, was it country cooking or classical cooking?"

Eventually, Willan may begin teaching here — the remodel at the new place includes a pivoting work island that son-in-law Schulkin designed that will allow her to convert the kitchen to a classroom if she desires.

But right now, her concern is bookshelves. She and her husband are ardent collectors of many things, but particularly books. They have more than 5,000 volumes, including a second edition "Le Cuisinier François" from 1652 by François Pierre de la Varenne, her school's namesake, and a 15th century incunabulum (early printed book) of dietary instructions for Latin monks. In fact, the couple are working on a book about their book collection.

Since the house had not a single bookshelf when they bought it, the first step in the

renovation was installing 350 feet of them (after reinforcing the floors to support the weight). Once that's taken care of, Willan will figure out what to do with the couple's collection of more than 200 gastronomic prints — some dating to the 17th century. When that's done, she'll find room for her mother's collection of wineglasses, the oldest of which date to the days of the Stuarts.

Food seems central to Willan's existence. Indeed, it seems to serve as a place of refuge during this hectic transition — a safe home base to which she can always return.

She's already started to attend the Saturday Pico farmers market. And she was very impressed by the grand Santa Monica Wednesday market.

Though her old farmers market in Joigny has history (it has operated more or less continuously since Roman times), splendid poultry, a foie gras producer and a couple of wonderful cheese merchants, she says the produce in Santa Monica is much more diverse and a lot of it is better than what she could get in France.

And then there's that peculiarly Santa Monica community spirit her greeter exemplified.

"It's all very idealistic, isn't it?" she says. "You can tell that this market has really been supported by the local community and the chefs and the local government. I get a very strong feeling of a market that is looking to the future, of accomplishing something important, of showing the way."

"I must say [the market in Joigny] is going through a very bad patch at this moment. But despite this, there is no thought that the local businesses ought to support the market in any way. There is no feeling that the market is something important to Joigny, or to our lives, or to the future. Most people shop there because it is cheaper than the supermarkets."

And those habits of analysis are still sharp. At lunch one day at Violet, the goth-modern res-

taurant on Pico, she likes the food but can't help keeping up a running commentary on the details of preparation (though she doesn't bat an eye when heavily mascaraed chef Jared Simons comes out to deliver a few dishes personally, looking a bit like an extra from the "Rocky Horror Picture Show.")

The potted pork rillettes are very good, she says, and it's a shame no one serves them anymore. Still, she observes that they're a little under-seasoned and that the onion marmalade on top is a bit too sweet. She's a little puzzled by the grilled romaine ("It's a little like what they do with radicchio in Italy, isn't it?"). But she's enthusiastic about the macaroni and cheese, threaded with leeks and strips of Serrano ham.

## Going native

**C**ALIFORNIA seems inevitably to change cooks who move here, even those as stolidly French as Willan. Indeed, she says she can already see that happening.

"It's changed me already, without my making any deliberate decisions," she says. "I'm one who always picks up what looks best when I go to the market and that is so different here than in France. We are eating much more meat — even beef, which we never ate in France. And much more greens and much more fruit."

"And we're eating funny things like seeds and sprouts. We eat a lot of mixed salads as first courses: some nice greens and crumbled cheese and then something crunchy for the top and something crunchy can be nuts and seeds. It's really very nice."

"We always thought we'd end our days in France. But I think we'll be fine. This is such a great place for food. It's a wonderful place to cook. The ingredients are outstanding, and there is so much going on. I do miss the cheese, though."

**Each serving:** 488 calories; 33 grams protein; 6 grams carbohydrates; 1 gram fiber; 36 grams fat; 16 grams saturated fat; 160 mg. cholesterol; 172 mg. sodium.

## Last-minute salmon with mustard

Total time: 35 minutes

Servings: 4

Note: Adapted from a recipe in "The Country Cooking of France" by Anne Willan

1 (1 1/4- to 1 1/2-pound) center-cut salmon fillet  
1 leek, green part only, cut in thin strips (a few inches long and 1/8-inch thick)  
1 carrot, cut into julienne strips  
Medium bunch fresh tarragon  
Salt and pepper  
1 tablespoon butter  
3/4 cup heavy cream  
1 1/2 teaspoons Dijon mustard, more to taste

**1. To cut the salmon in escalopes:** Set the fillet on a cutting board, tail end facing away from you. With a long, sharp knife, slice the fillet crosswise on the bias toward the tail end, discarding the skin when you reach it. Slices should be wide and flat — about 4 to 5 inches wide and about three-eighths-inch thick. Set them aside on a plate.

**2. Bring a pan of salted water to a boil, add the leek and carrot and blanch, about 2 minutes. Drain, rinse with cold water and drain them again thoroughly. Set aside four tarragon sprigs for decoration; discard the remaining stems and chop the leaves.**

**3. Sprinkle the salmon escalopes** each with a pinch of salt and a small pinch of pepper. Heat a cast iron or nonstick frying pan over high heat until very hot, then brush it with butter and add as many escalopes as will fit in a single layer. Cook until lightly browned on one side, about 1 minute. Turn and brown the other side, about 1 minute longer. Transfer them to another plate. Cook the remaining escalopes in the same way, cover with foil and keep them warm.

**4. Add the cream** to the pan and bring it to a boil. Whisk in the mustard, add the vegetables and heat gently for 1 minute, swirling the pan to mix in the vegetables. Swirl in the tarragon. Taste and adjust seasoning of the sauce with salt, pepper and more mustard.

**5. Arrange the cooked escalopes** on individual warm plates and spoon enough sauce over them to partially coat the salmon, leaving the pink edges. Top with a sprig of tarragon and serve.

**ANNE CUSACK Los Angeles Times**



russ.parsons@latimes.com

## Le vrai coq au vin

Total time: 2 1/2 hours, plus marinating time

Servings: 6 to 8

Note: Adapted from "The Country Cooking of France"

1 onion, sliced  
1 carrot, sliced  
2 celery stalks, sliced  
3 garlic cloves, divided  
1 teaspoon peppercorns  
1 (750-ml) bottle red wine  
Salt and black pepper  
5 to 6 pounds chicken legs and thighs  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 (6-ounce) piece of lean smoked bacon, or thick-sliced bacon  
1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
3 tablespoons flour  
2 cups chicken broth, more if needed  
2 shallots, chopped  
1 large bouquet garni of 2 bay leaves, 4 sprigs thyme and 5 to 6 stalks parsley tied together with kitchen twine  
2 tablespoons butter, or more if needed



ANNE CUSACK Los Angeles Times

16 to 18 baby onions, peeled  
1/2 pound button mushrooms, trimmed and quartered if large  
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

**1.** In a medium sautépan, bring the onion, carrot, celery, 1 clove garlic

(peeled), peppercorns and wine to a boil and simmer 5 minutes, and then cool the marinade completely.  
**2.** Rub each piece of chicken with a pinch each of salt and pepper. Pack the pieces in a deep, non-metallic bowl and pour the cooled marinade and flavorings over them. Spoon the olive oil over to keep the chicken moist. Cover with plastic wrap and let the chicken marinate in the refrigerator for at least a day, turning the pieces from time to time, and up to 3 days if you like a full-bodied flavor of wine.

**3.** Remove the chicken pieces from the marinade and pat them dry with paper towels. Strain and reserve the marinade liquid, keeping the vegetables separate. Heat the oven to 325 degrees. Cut the bacon into lardons — small cubes or sticks. If you're using thick-sliced bacon, cut the bacon crosswise into thin sticks.

**4.** Heat the oil in a braising pan and fry the lardons until browned and the fat runs. Transfer the lardons to a bowl using a slotted spoon and set aside for the garnish.

**5.** Add the chicken pieces to the pan, skin-side down, and sauté over medium heat until well browned, at least 10 minutes. Turn, cook until the other side browns, 3 to 5 minutes, and remove them. Do not

overcrowd the pan; if necessary, fry the chicken in two batches.

**6.** Add the reserved vegetables from the marinade to the pan and fry until they start to brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in the flour and cook over high heat, stirring until it browns, 2 to 3 minutes. Pour in the marinade liquid and bring to a boil, stirring constantly until the sauce thickens. Simmer 2 minutes, then stir in the broth with the shallots, the remaining two garlic cloves (chopped) and bouquet garni.

**7.** Return the chicken to the pan, pushing the pieces down under the sauce. Cover the pan and cook in the oven, turning the chicken occasionally, until the pieces are tender and fall easily from a two-pronged fork, about 40 minutes to 1 hour. Some pieces may be done before others — if so, remove them so they do not dry out from additional cooking, and continue cooking the rest.

**8.** Meanwhile cook the garnish. Melt the butter in a frying pan, add the onions, sprinkling one-eighth teaspoon salt and a pinch of pepper, and brown them over medium heat, about 5 to 7 minutes. Shake the pan from time to time so they color evenly. Lower the heat, cover and cook the onions, shaking the pan occasionally, until just tender,

8 to 10 minutes more. Remove them with a slotted spoon and add to the reserved lardons. Add the mushrooms to the pan, sprinkling a pinch each of salt and pepper and add a little more butter if needed. Sauté until tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Add them to the lardons and onions.

**9.** When the chicken is cooked, remove the pieces from the sauce and set them aside. Strain the sauce into a bowl, discarding the vegetables and seasonings. Use a ladle to skim any fat on the surface. Wipe out the pan and add the garnish. Stir in the sauce; if it seems thick, add a little more broth. If it's too thin, reduce over high heat. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Add the chicken pieces, pushing them well down into the

sauce, and heat gently 3 to 5 minutes so the flavors blend. Coq au vin improves if you keep it, covered, in the refrigerator at least a day and up to 3 days so the flavor mellows before serving.

**10.** To serve, reheat the chicken with the garnish and sauce on top of the stove. Transfer the chicken pieces to a serving dish or individual plates and spoon over the garnish with a little sauce. Sprinkle the chicken with chopped parsley and serve any remaining sauce separately.

Each serving: 566 calories; 46 grams protein; 11 grams carbohydrates; 2 grams fiber; 30 grams fat; 9 grams saturated fat; 179 mg. cholesterol; 692 mg. sodium.

## Tarte Tatin

Total time: 2 hours

Servings: 8 to 10

Note: Adapted from "The Country Cooking of France" by Anne Willan. Find tarte Tatin molds at Sur la Table stores and Surfas in Culver City.

### Pâte brisée

1 2/3 cups flour  
1 egg yolk  
3/4 teaspoon salt  
6 tablespoons butter

**1.** Sift the flour into a mound on the work surface and make a well in the center. Put the egg yolk, salt and 3 tablespoons of water in the well. Pound the butter with a rolling pin to soften it, then add it to the well and work the ingredients in the well with the fingers of one hand until thoroughly mixed.

**2.** Using a pastry scraper, gradually draw in flour from the sides and continue working with both hands until coarse crumbs form. The crumbs should be soft but not sticky; if the crumbs seem dry, sprinkle them with another tablespoon of water. Press the dough gently together into a ball; it will be uneven and unblended at this point.

**3.** Sprinkle the counter with flour. With the heel of your hand, push

the dough away from you, flattening it against the counter. Gather it up, press it into a rough ball and flatten it again. Continue kneading until the dough is pliable as putty and pulls away from the counter in one piece, 1 to 2 minutes. Don't overwork the dough or the crust will be tough. Shape it into a ball, wrap and chill in the refrigerator until firm, 15 to 30 minutes.

### Filling and assembly

About 5 pounds firm apples, preferably Pink Lady or Golden Delicious

1/2 cup butter  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
Pâte brisée

**1.** While the dough is chilling, peel the apples and cut them in half from stem to bottom; scoop out the cores with a melon baller.

**2.** Melt the butter over medium heat in a 10- to 11-inch oven-proof, straight-sided skillet (preferably nonstick) or a tarte Tatin mold. Sprinkle the sugar over the butter and cook without stirring until the mixture begins to brown and caramelize. The mixture will look coarse and dry at first, but gradually the sugar will melt and brown. Stir gently to avoid splashing sugar on the sides of the pan where it will

scorch, and continue cooking until the caramel is deep golden brown, 6 to 10 minutes total. Remove the pan from the heat and let the caramel cool in the pan for 3 to 5 minutes — the butter will separate, but this does not matter.

**3.** Arrange the apples in the pan in concentric circles standing up on end — the caramel will help to anchor them. Pack them as tightly as possible because they will shrink during cooking. Cook the apples over medium heat until the juice starts to run, about 8 minutes, then raise the heat and cook them as fast as possible until the undersides are caramelized to deep golden and most of the juice has evaporated, 15 to 25 minutes. If the caramel begins to bubble over the sides of the pan, reduce the heat just enough to keep it cooking quickly without overflowing.

**4.** With a two-pronged fork, turn the apples over, one by one, so the upper sides are now down in the caramel. Continue cooking until these second sides also are golden and almost all the juice has evaporated, 10 to 20 minutes more. The time will vary with the variety and ripeness of the apples, and can take up to an hour in total. When the apples are done, remove them from the heat and let them cool to tepid while heating the oven to 400

degrees.

**5.** Roll the pastry dough to a round just larger than the skillet holding the apples. Wrap the dough around the rolling pin and transfer it to cover the apples. Tuck the edges down around the apples, working quickly so their warmth does not melt the dough. Poke a hole in the center to allow steam to escape. Bake the tart until the pastry is firm and lightly browned, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove the tart from the oven and let it cool for at least 10 minutes, or until tepid. If using a tarte Tatin mold, the tart can be made up to 12 hours ahead and kept in the mold in the refrigerator; if using a skillet, proceed to Step 6 immediately.

**6.** To finish, warm the tart in the skillet on the stove or in the oven before you turn it out; this softens the caramel and loosens the apples. Select a flat platter with a lip to catch any juices; set the platter on top of the tart pan and flip the tart onto the platter. Be careful, because you can be splashed with hot juice. Cut into wedges to serve.

Each serving: 430 calories; 3 grams protein; 71 grams carbohydrates; 3 grams fiber; 17 grams fat; 10 grams saturated fat; 63 mg. cholesterol; 178 mg. sodium.

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