



MAY/JUNE

>>> PUSHING A MENU FORWARD

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Our long wait for a break in the weather seems infused with a spirit of renewal and hope. Long nights and grey days turn into sunny afternoons and wistful musings on how to enjoy the fresh fruits and vegetables that are just around the bend.

One can't help but get excited at the thought of fresh asparagus and sweet hoop house greens that are plentiful this time of year. The abundant rhubarb is sure to fill pies and tarts for weeks to come, and tender English peas are appearing in every imaginable variation, from smooth soups to lightly sautéed with fresh mint.

It's easy to get caught up in the emotion of a new season if you're a foodie. You've spent the last few months sustaining yourself with root vegetables, braised meats, and possibly a hearty helping of

pasta. Now it's time to push your menu forward! Clean out the pantry and replace winter fare with light, flavorful ingredients. Soon, strawberries will be abundant and the season's first green beans will arrive. Prepare your kitchen to make the most of the season's offerings.

Replace butter with seed and nut oils. Grapeseed oil is a great staple -- neutral in flavor and cholesterol-free with a high smoke point. You can cook with high heat for fast preparation of fresh vegetables and seafood.

Rehab your spice cabinet. This is the perfect time of year to sort out old herbs and spices. These ingredients start losing flavor when they're exposed to air. Most herbs and spices are only useful for a year. Think about turning to fresh herbs when you can and grinding spices as needed.

Lighten up your cooking and focus on

lighter recipes like marinated and grilled meats. It's the perfect opportunity to experiment with a variety of vinegars and assorted fruit juices to add flavor.

Shop locally, cook globally. You haven't lived until you've experienced a spicy curry, the perfect complement to the young potatoes that begin showing up in late spring. Ingredients like pomegranate molasses, fresh ginger, and Thai red curry are all available locally and can give your meal an exotic taste.

Spring sets the stage for the vast variety of local fruits and vegetables that are available throughout the summer and fall in Michigan. You can look at it as a warm-up to get you ready for a full summer season of cooking. Take advantage of the chance to move your menu forward and explore new flavors and ingredients to accompany the season's fresh produce.