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Made in New Zealand

by Debbie Elkind - 8th July 2009 | 09:32 AET

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A quiet revolution is taking place across the Tasman, as New Zealand chefs and consumers increasingly embrace homegrown produce.

New Zealand's alcohol and beverage industry has mastered the art of successful global marketing with New Zealand sauvignon blancs, and increasingly pinot noirs, winning accolades and fans the world over, just as the 42Below Vodka and Antipodes water ranges have made a huge splash internationally.

Much less well known and understood, even amongst many Kiwis, is the wide diversity of New Zealand's unique native produce. But, thanks to talented local producers and chefs – and some ambitious exporters – this is slowly, but surely, changing.

New Zealand chefs and consumers are increasingly embracing homegrown produce, including native herbs such as **horopito** and **kawakawa**, korengo (Maori seaweed); puha (a freshwater thistle), **pikopiko** (native fern fronds); **kumara** (a variety of sweet potato), and **Maori potatoes**.

Also on the rise, both at home and abroad, is awareness of the desirability of the nation's seafood, particularly Koura (crayfish) and Kutai (green-lipped mussels), thanks to its availability and affordability and the purity of the country's waterways.



Puffball mushrooms, considered a delicacy in Europe, grow wild in New Zealand.



The acclaimed **Saffron** restaurant in the Queenstown-Arrowtown basin rests at the foot of soaring snow-capped mountains, amid fields of wildflowers and pristine river streams. Little wonder then that owner Pete Gawron gazed around at the view and decided to source and harvest as much of the produce for his restaurant from the surrounding environs as possible.

The result is an extravagant, imaginative menu featuring such delights as risotto of Dunedin coast crayfish, Queen scallops and green-lipped mussels or Cascade whitebait served in three styles. Other local delicacies on the menu include Merino lamb from Cardrona, Bendigo game birds, Wakatipu eel, paua from the Caitlins and freshwater crayfish.

Originally from Adelaide, Gawron was impressed by the diversity of local produce available in the region. In addition to sourcing from local suppliers, he hand-harvests wild produce from the nearby mountains, including snowberries, puffball mushrooms (considered a delicacy in Europe) and birch boletus (a fungal relative of porcini).

Gawron is far from the only chef being inspired by native produce. Another is **Jason Dell**, former executive chef for the exclusive **Blanket Bay** at Lake Wakatipu near Queenstown and now Corporate Executive Chef for AC2 International, a privately owned hospitality company. Among the recipes in Dell's cookbook *Savvy* is seared New Zealand venison with horopito and blackcurrant compote.

"As in many other countries, 'paddock-to-plate' is increasingly more common," says Dell. "Sustainability in New Zealand is fast gaining significantly greater awareness and profile and the desire to farm, grow, and survive off our own land is rapidly gaining momentum."

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1. **Mahindi ya naz**

Dell believes that New Zealand's indigenous products provide the perfect showcase for the nation's unique biodiversity. He notes, however, that native produce is in its infancy commercially and general knowledge still has some way to go too.

"Unless you watch the Maori TV channel, there is very little broadcasting or promotion of how to cook native NZ ingredients and Maori recipe books are also a rarity," says Dell.

One notable exception is chef Anne Thorp who presents *Kai Ora* on Maori TV and who has a cookbook by the same released in April, 2009 by Random House New Zealand. Dubbed the "Maori Queen of Cuisine" by the network, Thorp presents light, healthy dishes that allow the natural flavours of New Zealand's native seafood, herbs, ferns, fruits and veges to shine through, such as raw kutai (New Zealand green-lipped mussels) served with kalamata olives, capers, feta and lime juice.

Thorp says there's been a "renaissance" of native foods in recent years, particularly with farmers' markets mushrooming across the country.

"I think the market gardeners have begun to diversify and this is why we're seeing more Maori food available, but Maori are also becoming more aware and they do love their food," she says.

"With the recession happening here and everywhere else, people are becoming more inclined to cook what they've got or come across rather than ignore it... a lot of ingredients are becoming more visible at the farmers' markets and even in the supermarkets," says Thorp. "We've come a long way really quite recently."



Pete Gawron's braised Wakatipu eel.

Buying New Zealand Made

While native New Zealand produce is still far from widely available in Australia, there are efforts afoot by New Zealand trade organisations to make products available across the Tasman and elsewhere. Places you can source New Zealand produce include...

Maori Food

Chef Charles Royal is a great champion of Maori cooking and indigenous produce. Visit this site to learn about his Maori food tours and purchase wild herbs, rubs and seasonings.

NZ Alpine Gourmet

A range of uniquely New Zealand sweet treats, including Manuka honey drops and chocolates and Kiwifruit butter shortbread.

Products from NZ

You can source a wide range of New Zealand products here, including Honeylands dessert sauces and Wild Country olive oils and vinegars.

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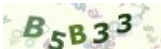
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Clarified butter

To make clarified butter gently melt unsalted butter over low heat. After time the butter will form three distinct layers - the foam on top (which is skimmed off and discarded), the milk solids (which will sink to the bottom) and the clarified butter will be left in the middle.

Glossary

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Nar Eksili

Pomegranate molasses used for salad dressings and marinades it has a savoury, semi sweet taste.

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