

Brightflower



Nursery

GATHER A GROUP OF FOUR OR MORE, AND GET COOKING

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resh, healthy, simple and delicious are apt adjectives to describe the foods that come from Chef Michael Staver's cooking classes. Co-owner with his wife, Jeanie McKewan, the couple has created Brightflower Nursery, a four-acre, organic oasis in Stockton's countryside, located at 650 N. Stockton Road, just off Route 20.

Jeanie brings 12 years of horticultural experience, passion and commitment to growing the finest plant materials available. Her academic background includes an environmental science degree from Willamette University, a plant pathology degree from Oregon State University, and Certified Landscape Professional certification. In the Chicago area, she managed Montale Gardens and was nursery operations manager for award-winning Craig Bergmann Landscape Design.

All nursery products at Brightflower are certified

organic by Midwest Organic Services Association, and are produced using strict organic principals. Vegetables, herbs, and edible and ornamental flowers are organically grown in the greenhouses, while organic field production focuses on a brilliant array of cut flowers from Mother's Day through Thanksgiving. Custom container gardens - particularly designed for the

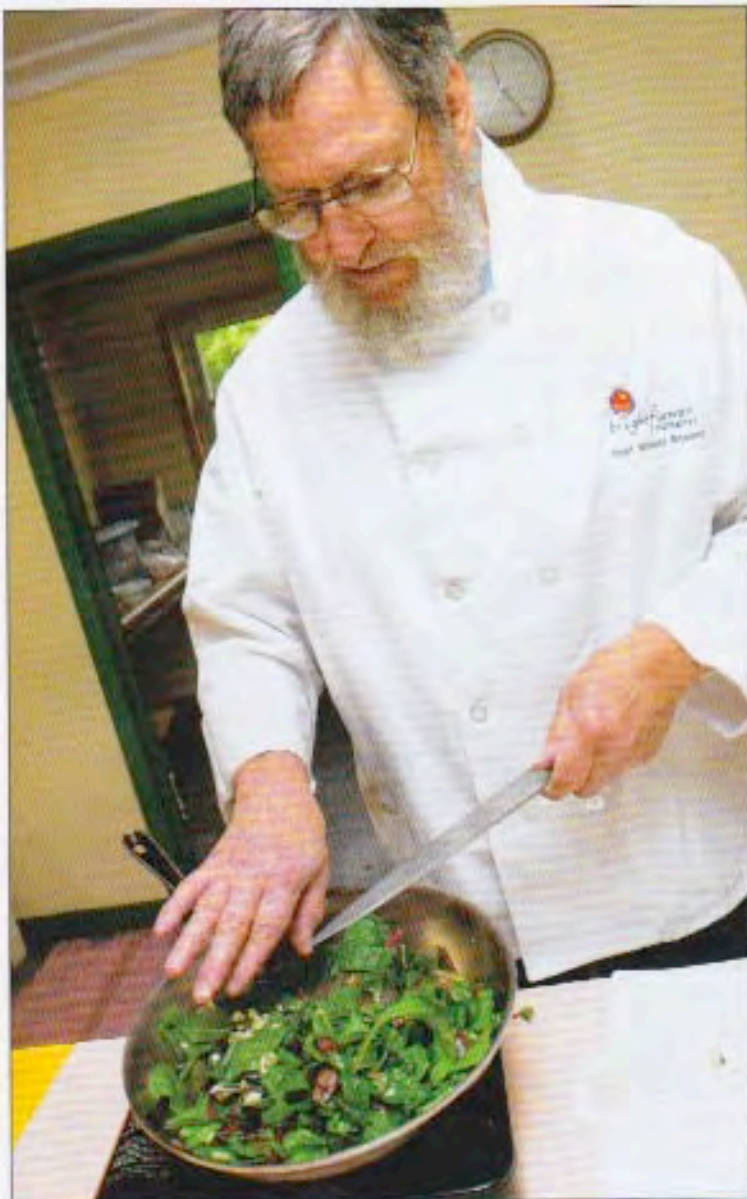
urban gardener - are a specialty. Jeanie's wholesale customers include Whole Foods Market Midwest, Florists Products Distributor's Inc. in Des Moines, Iowa, and garden centers in Chicagoland.



Jeanie McKewan and Chef Michael Staver are shown at Brightflower Nursery in Stockton, located just off Route 20.

Jeanie and Michael's passion for healthy and delicious food have inspired the many wonderful garden combinations offered by Brightflower Nursery, including pots of salad fixings ready for guests to snip at the table.

Weekdays, Staver is a chef/instructor at Kendall Culinary College in Chicago and at the University of Illinois, Chicago campus. An award-winning barbecue chef, he teaches the art of barbecue, food science, food culture, cheese making, environmental biology and vegetarian cuisine. But most weekends he's in Stockton and available to teach classes for four or more people. The Garden Center of Brightflower Nursery includes a new, licensed food-prep area. All of his Saturday and Sunday classes are taught here; however, he also enjoys catering "teaching" dinner parties on location which can be an informal gathering for six to 12 or a sumptuous buffet for 50. ⇨



Chef Staver uses only the best tasting olive oil when creating Swiss chard. He also adds a palmful of kosher salt while sautéing the Swiss chard stems.

TAPPING INTO THE CHEF'S EXPERTISE

Spending a day with the chef is another way to take advantage of Staver's expertise. This summer, there are two programs offered on weekends: The Art of Barbecue and The Art of Smoked Meats. Both classes include snacks and enough food to take home for a meal for two. Students prepare the meats, all side dishes, and take away lots of kitchen tips. Classes require a four-person minimum and cost \$70 per person or \$135 per couple. The Art of Barbecue Menu includes pork tenderloin, chicken, Jambalaya, baked beans, tossed salad, and barbecue sauce. Carolina pulled pork, pork ribs, turkey breast, chicken, pork tenderloin, coleslaw, and barbecue sauce are the featured offerings on the Smoked Meats Menu.

Another type of cooking class is the Taste of Fine Dining Series where students learn menu possibilities to create in their own kitchens. In each class, tastes of all the items are provided, along with the recipes. Pasta is planned for Aug. 8, Mexican for Sept. 12, Cajun for Oct. 10, and Soups and Stew for Nov. 7. Classes are scheduled

for the afternoons from 1 to 3:30 p.m. and cost \$45 each. A minimum of four people is needed for each class.

Simple and Fresh, another series of classes being offered on several Saturdays this year, is an introduction to cooking skills using whole foods and fresh ingredients. Chicken is the topic scheduled for the morning of July 25. August through October there are Saturday afternoon classes planned monthly featuring Appetizers, Basic Grill, and Soups. Simple and Fresh classes are priced at \$30 per person with a minimum of four.

All classes are fairly flexible, but reservations are required. More information is available by calling (815) 947-2647 or visiting www.brightflownursery.com.

LEARNING FIRST-HAND

This spring, I attended a Simple and Fresh class on Vegetables and found it interesting and educational. One of the things I liked best was Chef Staver's way of explaining how the interaction of ingredients works in a recipe. A microbiologist by trade – in fact he and Jeanie met at Oregon State University where they were majoring in Botany and Plant Pathology – he spent about 20 years

working for Abbott Laboratories in the Chicago area.

During this time, they often visited Judy Wallace, a friend who lived in Apple River and became acquainted with the beauty and lifestyle of Jo Daviess County. While employed at Abbott Laboratories, he discovered Kendall College and ended up taking classes there. Upon graduation in 2000, he embarked on what he describes as his 14th career. Among his food service credentials are catering, working in Kendall's production kitchen, and teaching at the college level.

In 2006, the couple decided to relocate to Stockton. Jeanie set about transforming the land and remodeling the buildings to include a food demonstration area for the cooking classes. Plans are to develop a Bistro Cafe to accommodate 20 to 30 diners, as well as being available for private parties. Licensure is complete and preparation for a restaurant stove has been made.

During the Vegetable class, we learned - in no particular order:

- * That the vegetables most people like are slightly acid.
- * To preserve the color or chlorophyll in vegetables, blanch them in salted ice water, using a couple of tablespoons of kosher salt.
- * To make the green pop, when cleaning green beans, break off the tip not the blossom end.
- * The flavor of sea salt varies and depends on the geographic area of origin.
- * Extra Virgin Olive Oil from Australia is a Chef favorite.
- * Fresh herbs are better if cut with a knife, not scissors.
- * Lemon is a great lifter of flavors.
- * A microwave heats from the inside out, thus food does not brown as there is no interaction between the protein and carbohydrates.
- * Asparagus is done when the spears get a "bend" to them.
- * In planning a buffet, figure three times the amount when people "help themselves." Put the starches first in ⇨



ABOVE: Jeanie McKewan is shown with some of the produce available at Brightflower Nursery. **TOP RIGHT:** Chef Michael Staver poses with his custom-made smoker at Brightflower Nursery.

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Brightflower Nursery

650 N. Stockton Road
(just off Route 20), Stockton

Phone: (815) 947-2647

Online: www.brightflowernursery.com.

“If you like to eat, you should be able to cook.”

— Chef Michael Staver



the buffet line, ahead of the meat.

* About 15 spears of asparagus equal nearly one pound which makes two-to-three servings.

* Only dress the salad greens, not the other salad ingredients.

* Flavor enhancers for green beans are dill, garlic, cumin, tarragon, and summer savory.



The class included lessons and recipes for six vegetables: yellow squash or zucchini with fresh basil; avocado, grapefruit and red onion salad; cabbage salad; fresh green beans; fresh asparagus; and Wondrous Carrots, one of my favorites, which follows:

Note: Chef Staver used Nielsen-Massey Vanilla from Waukegan, Illinois and Madagascar Bourbon available at www.nielsenmassey.com.

WONDROUS CARROTS

Ingredients

- 2 cups sliced fresh carrots
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons brandy (or more to taste)
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract (or more to taste)

Method

Drop the carrots into boiling water to barely cover. (Don't cook carrots with salt as it toughens the carrots. Salt carrots just before serving.)

Simmer uncovered until just tender, about 5-10 minutes.

Drain the carrots and add the brandy, vanilla extract, and butter, with a pinch of salt. □

