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With warm weather in the air, it's time for fresh bursts of flavor

I am so ready for summer — longer days, warmer nights and patio conversations that end with ice cream for the kids and cold beverages for the adults. Pandemic or not, summer officially starts June 20 on the calendar but what happens after that, well, that's a mystery.

Pools aren't open. Summer camps have been canceled. Beach trips are questionable. Ballparks are quiet.

Heck, at my house, we haven't even pulled our grill out yet.

Summer may feel different this year but it doesn't have to taste different. There are certain foods that especially hit the spot when the temperature goes up and they all have common themes: fresh and bright and easy.

These include cool salsas that require only a spin in a food processor or blender and a spritz of lime, and easy homemade pickles, either garlicky and dilly, or sweet and tangy, that accompany backyard meals of burgers and beans or simple afternoon sandwiches and iced tea.

And when I finally get around to pulling out the grill, I'll drizzle bright, punchy chimichurri over seared steaks and chicken and everything that goes with them.

Summer tastes can't be stymied, so I'll start with a household favorite: salsa.

If you opened my fridge on any given day, you'd



PHOTOS BY HOLLY PRESTIDGE/TIMES-DISPATCH

A taste of summer

find several jars of the stuff. We eat a lot of it, especially during the summer. Thin, chunky, black bean and corn — all mild, because no one in my house can take much heat. Plus, given that we're home all the time now, I'd much rather my daughter munch on baked tortilla chips and salsa than fried potato chips.

Salsa is relatively inexpensive to buy, but what you can't get in a jar is that

burst of bright fresh flavors — tomatoes and cilantro and garlic and onions. Think of the fresh-tasting salsas served in restaurants and that's what you'll get if you make it yourself. The best part is, there's no magic formula, just use what you like. (Sure, you could buy fresh salsa in the refrigerated section, but it's usually more expensive, and making your own gives you more flexibility.)

I start with Roma tomatoes and add fresh garlic, cilantro (we're big fans) and a little onion. I went with just a hint of heat, thanks to a poblano pepper. Poblanos aren't as spicy as jalapeños but offer more heat than bell peppers or sweet banana peppers.

This is a thin salsa, just the way we like it, but if you prefer chunky, simply keep the processing or blending **SUMMER, Page C2**

Fresh Salsa ▲

You can't beat fresh chilled salsa on a hot day. I went with mild poblano peppers but you could ratchet up the heat with jalapeños or other hot varieties. Feel free to adjust everything — garlic, cilantro, onion, etc.

- 6 large Roma tomatoes, halved and seeded**
- 1-2 garlic cloves**
- ¾ cup chopped cilantro**
- ½ of a small onion**
- ½ cup chopped poblano pepper**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**
- 1 lime**

To the bowl of a food processor (or a blender), add tomatoes, garlic, cilantro, onion and poblano and process on high until it reaches your desired consistency. Taste for salt and pepper and pulse again to mix.

Before serving, spritz with fresh lime juice.
— Holly Prestidge

Garlic Dill Cucumber Spears (Easy Pickles)

I call these easy pickles because they only take a matter of minutes to go from plain cucumbers to garlicky stars. Just beware — these are for garlic-lovers only.

- 2 medium garden-variety cucumbers, cut in half across the middle, then cut in half lengthwise and each quarter cut into spears**
- 2 garlic cloves**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- ¼ cup finely chopped fresh dill**

Place cucumber spears into a large bowl. Mash garlic with salt on a cutting board until a paste forms. Put the garlic mash on the spears and add dill. Stir well so the spears are covered. Chill in the fridge for about 20 minutes, or until you're ready to eat them.

— Adapted from CrossCulturalKitchen.com



Just add garlic and this one-skillet chicken dish will deliver



TOM MCCORKLE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Mosca's Chicken a la Grande is a simple, but flavorful one-skillet meal that includes white wine, garlic and herbs.

BY ANN MALONEY
The Washington Post

If you're like me, you may find yourself craving dishes from your favorite restaurants these days. I moved to Washington in mid-December, so I have not had much of a chance to build a roster of must-haves from restaurants here.

Instead, during these stay-at-home days, I find myself longing for dishes from my hometown of New Orleans: Bevi Seafood's roast beef po-boy, Heard Dat Kitchen's fried chicken with mac and cheese, Brigtsen's gumbo or, oh man, R&O's perfectly fried Gulf shrimp platter.

Each of those is difficult for me to truly replicate — most of my

favorite restaurant dishes are. It can be tough to get the right ingredients, especially now, and I often do not have the specific recipe, skills or tools required.

But recently a reader's simple question sparked a craving for a specific dish, and I nailed it: Mosca's Chicken a la Grande.

The reader asked for advice: She swore she had ordered 1 head of garlic from a grocery delivery service, but she got 10. What should she do?

As I read through those garlic recipes, suddenly all I wanted to eat was Mosca's simple platter of pan-fried chicken seasoned with tons of garlic and a generous amount of herbs.

Mosca's, a family-owned Italian restaurant just outside New Or-

leans, features a few recipes on its website, but I opted to dig out my copy of Kit Wohl's "New Orleans Classic Celebrations" because it includes Mary Jo Mosca's version of Chicken a la Grande, which features the addition of a little white wine.

This dish is quick and easy to prepare in one skillet, but it fills your kitchen with deliciously pungent smells and delivers big flavor.

Chicken pieces are doused in white wine, generously seasoned with salt and pepper and pan-fried in olive oil until golden brown. Then, in go 10 cloves of smashed garlic and 1 tablespoon each of dried rosemary and oregano. The whole thing is covered and simmered until the chicken is

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