

Going Verde

by Mary Ann Esposito

Challenging economic times often give a boost to worldwide concerns like caring for the environment, recycling, pollution control and sustainability. It seems there is renewed focus on going green; even First Lady Michelle Obama recently broke ground at the White House for a vegetable garden.



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Going green is nothing new to Italians who, with even a meager patch of earth at their disposal, can grow an abundance of fresh vegetables, herbs, flowers and fruits. This

was true years ago, when it would have been unthinkable to my grandfather's generation not to have garden in their adopted country, an endearing connection to *bell'Italia*.

Italian American gardens were reflective of what immigrants were used to eating. Some of the more familiar plants

were *pummarola* (plum tomatoes), *lattuga* (lettuce), *cicoria* (bitter greens), *zucca* (squash), *mentuccia* (mint), *basilico* (basil) and *fagiolini* (green beans). These and other vegetables were prepared and served according to the dictates of tradition. A good example is *insalata* (salad), which was a mix of different greens, served after the main course.

This tradition was a hold-over from Italy and other European countries like France who viewed the salad course as a digestive, a calming down after the meal. That is why, in Italy, salads are generally served after the main course, which often seems strange to visitors. The traditional dressing for salad has always been extra-virgin olive oil and a good quality red wine vinegar or lemon juice. Croutons, bits of raw garlic and creamy dressings have no place in an *insalata Italiana*. So go green this spring and summer, plant a garden for your salad bowl and do some good for yourself and *terra madre* too. ➤



Insalata Verde Green Salad

Serves 4

2 cups torn romaine lettuce leaves,
washed and dried
1 cup torn arugola leaves,
washed and dried
1 cup torn escarole leaves,
washed and dried
1/2 cup torn basil leaves
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
Fine sea salt to taste

Place all the lettuces in a salad bowl.
In a small bowl, whisk the oil and
vinegar together with the salt and
pour the dressing over the salad.
Toss well and serve immediately.



Fagiolini alla Menta Beans With Mint

Serves 8

Olive oil
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 cup minced fresh mint
1 teaspoon chopped fresh oregano or
1/2 teaspoon dried
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 pound tender green beans

In a 9-x-12-inch glass dish, whisk all the dress-
ing ingredients together. Set aside.

Trim the beans. Put them in a large pot
and add cold water to cover. Bring to a
boil and cook just until a small knife easily
pierces the beans. They should still have a
little bite to them.

Drain, and immediately add the beans to the
dressing. Toss well to coat them, cover and
allow the beans to marinate several hours at
room temperature before serving them.



Recipes courtesy of www.ciaoitalia.com and Mary Ann Esposito. More salad recipes and Italian seed varieties available at www.ciaoitalia.com