

Chef Aaron Chamberlin fosters his children's love of healthy eating by involving them in the cooking process. Here, Schaefer, age 3, and Arturo, 5, help prepare salads for an afternoon meal.



GARDEN TO TABLE

FOR CHEF AARON CHAMBERLIN, EATING HEALTHY BEGINS AT HOME.

BY REBECCA L. RHOADES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID B. MOORE

AS ONE OF THE VALLEY'S TOP CHEFS, Aaron Chamberlin understands the importance of using fresh-from-the-garden produce in his menu items. Every day, hungry diners flock to his chic downtown eateries, Phoenix Public Market and Taco Chelo, for approachable cuisine featuring seasonal ingredients sourced from local purveyors. But there was time when the health-conscious locavore didn't practice what he now preaches.



BEAN AND PEA SALAD

- ½ cup green beans
- ½ cup yellow wax beans
- ½ cup snap peas
- ½ cup green peas
- 3 ounces red wine vinaigrette

Prepare vinaigrette, set aside. Blanch all vegetables in boiling water until tender, about 30 seconds. Remove vegetables from water and immediately submerge in an ice bath. Drain well. Toss in vinaigrette. Add salt and pepper to taste.

RED WINE VINAIGRETTE

- ¾ ounce red wine vinegar
- 2¼ ounces extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard (or more to taste)
- Salt and pepper

In a small bowl, whisk vinegar and Dijon mustard. Add salt and pepper to taste. Slowly add olive oil in a steady stream, continuing to whisk until emulsified.

Serves 4

“I was raised in a family that loved junk food. Even when I was a baby, my mom used to put soda in my bottle,” Aaron recalls. “I had no parameters to what I ate. I could have ice cream for breakfast, pizza rolls, tons of processed food. Every day for four years, my mom would pick me and my brothers up from school, and we’d go to Circle K to get Slurpees and candy—not occasionally but every single day.

“I started to gain weight when I was about 8 years old, and by the time I graduated from high school, I weighed 260 pounds and had pimples all over my face. I was not thriving,” he adds.

The food addiction led to other addictions, including drugs and a 30-year cigarette habit. The stress of working 70-plus-hour weeks in a leading French restaurant in New York City caused him to slim

down to 180 pounds, but it wasn’t until he met his wife, Lee, and she became pregnant with their first son, Arturo, that Aaron began to re-evaluate his detrimental lifestyle. “I realized how much damage I had done to myself, and I knew that I never wanted my kids to go through the same thing.”

GROWING A GOOD LIFE

Now that Chamberlin has conquered his own poor eating habits, he’s determined that his two children—and another one due any day—won’t follow in his footsteps.

For the past 10 years, the chef has been cultivating an envy-inducing garden at his home in Phoenix’s Coronado district. “I started with herbs, and I just kept going,” he says. Today, his lush



Melons, such as this native species, are easy to grow in the Arizona climate. They're a staple in Aaron's garden.

landscape teems with a cornucopia of vegetables and citrus. There are 22 lemon trees, as well as peach, lime, pomegranate, grapefruit, guava and orange trees. A white mulberry tree produces about 90 pints of fruit annually. Two *Moringa oleifera* are chock-full of vitamins and minerals. "Moringas are one of the most nutrient-dense types of trees in the world," Aaron explains. "I put the leaves in my kids' smoothies."

Upwards of 65 varieties of vegetables are harvested year-round from a raised bed. In the winter, the chef grows four or five different kinds of kale, as well as Swiss chard, carrots, beets, radishes, cabbage, okra, chiles, broccoli and cauliflower. Summer yields tomatoes, squash, cucumbers and melons. "I've been to markets all over the world, and no place has better melons than Arizona does," Aaron notes. "One summer,

I harvested 60 fruits. I had a different melon every day for two months." Masses of herbs, basil, marjoram, lemon verbena, Kaffir lime bushes and lemongrass punctuate the yard, lending softness and texture to the green lawn and red brick house.

"The whole goal with my garden is to harvest something every single day that will give my family nutrients," the chef explains. Arturo, age 5, and his younger brother, Schaefer, 3, can often be found getting their hands dirty planting and picking vegetables—and snacking on the spoils of their labors. "They eat everything from the garden," Aaron says. "I have videos of them literally eating raw broccoli heads straight off the stalk."

Sunday mornings find the family hanging out in the yard, tending to their garden, harvesting mature produce and cooking up delicious meals that even the



CITRUS SALAD

- 1 blood orange
- 1 honeybell orange (also known as a Minneola tangelo)
- 1 navel orange
- 2 dates, sliced lengthwise into spears
- ½ cup mixed greens
- Salt and pepper
- Sweet shallot vinaigrette

Prepare vinaigrette, set aside. Peel oranges and slice into thin pinwheels. Assemble slices on plates to resemble mosaic tiles. Drizzle with sweet shallot vinaigrette. Top with dates and mixed greens. Add salt and pepper to taste.

SWEET SHALLOT VINAIGRETTE

- 1 shallot
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 2 teaspoons champagne vinegar
- Salt and pepper

Mince shallot and add to a small pan with olive oil. Simmer until shallot pieces are tender and translucent. Mix in honey, champagne vinegar, salt and pepper. Serves 4



LEFT The Chamberlins frequently dine outdoors in their home's garden. Aaron and his wife, Lee, encourage sons Arturo and Schaefer to sample the many fresh fruits and vegetables that are harvested in their backyard. **ABOVE** A sampling of the produce Aaron grows. "My goal is to have something fresh to eat every day," the chef says.

youngest enjoys. Notes Lee, "It's always fun for the boys to get out there and try stuff. We make it a game—we talk about each item and then they get to rate it."

HELPING FAMILIES

Arturo's and Schaefer's exploits in the garden have garnered considerable interest on social media. Now they serve as the impetus for Aaron's newest business venture: Chef Dad.

Leveraging Aaron's years in the food industry with his experience raising children and teaching them to eat healthy and enjoy a variety of vegetables, the multi-channel brand, which is scheduled to launch in early summer, will include a website, app, books, YouTube videos, cooking classes and possibly even a subscription agriculture service.

"There's nothing out there like this," Aaron explains. "There are a lot of nutritionists and mommy bloggers, but there's no male chef who is coming to the table. I want to inspire parents to connect with their children through food and create healthier households."

One of the biggest parenting failures Aaron sees is the creation of picky eaters. "I've fed people for 33 years,

and I'll see parents come into my restaurants and order a beautiful plate of food, and then they'll give their child a bag of Cheerios," he explains.

Ever since their kids graduated to solid foods, the Chamberlins have been feeding them the same meals that the adults eat. By slowly introducing items that are considered an acquired taste, such as olives, sardines or broccoli rabe, they allow the boys to explore unfamiliar flavors on their own terms. "There's no drama, no pressure. If they don't want to eat something, we don't make them," Aaron says. "Sometimes it takes a lot of exposures to develop a great palate."

Aaron also involves Arturo and Schaefer in the cooking process; each child has his own wood knife and cutting board. The boys helped their dad create the salads featured on these pages using ingredients picked fresh from the garden. The dishes are just two examples of simple, healthy meals that are easy to make—and delicious to eat.

"Growing your own food changes your whole game when it comes to cooking at home," Aaron explains. "Your food not only tastes better, but it is so nutritious."

For more information, see Sources on Page 158