

# A PECK OF PICKLED PEPPERS

## Brian Scheehser of Trellis Restaurant

BY ASHLEY GARTLAND  
PHOTOS BY CLARE BARBOZA

As the esteemed executive chef of Kirkland's Trellis Restaurant, Chef Brian Scheehser totes some odd tools, among them garden shears, a pocket full of twist ties and, occasionally, a hip-high gardening shovel. In place of a starched dog-and-pony chef coat, he sports a t-shirt and shorts. His ride is a little red pickup that provides the final clue that Scheehser is more than Trellis's chef. He's also the farmer. "I like to say that I'm 75 percent chef and 75 percent farmer," he jokes.

Nine years ago, Scheehser leased a plot of land on the South 47th Farm and began his farm education along the pastoral back roads of Woodinville. Initially, he planned to grow produce for his home kitchen but as the harvests came and went he started incorporating bits of the farm's crops on menus at his former restaurant post; when he moved to Trellis, he immediately established that the produce grown on his nearby farm would be an integral part of his menu.

Scheehser has now expanded his plot to cover five acres; on it, he nurtures everything from Asian pears to Swiss chard and his resident bees. Every morning, he drives that little red pickup to the farm to work the fields and harvest produce to feature on the daily menu, or preserve for the months to come. All the while, he's cultivating a deeper understanding of the ingredients he uses and the landscape they come from.

Additionally, he's turned his one-time hobby into a valuable opportunity to grow hard-to-find produce—like pineapple sage—for his kitchen. "Certain things like pineapple sage...you can't really find it from the purveyors. We fry the sage leaves, put them in salads, and use them in so many applications," he says. "The other part of it [farming] is that I have as much produce as I want. The quantity is unlimited because if we use everything in the field or nothing in the field, it doesn't really matter. It's just here for the restaurant and for my guests."

Visit the farm in high harvest season and Scheehser will point out the patches where he raised 1,000 'Purple Passion' asparagus from seed to mature plant, and a plot of 30 different varieties of tomatoes that bear skin as taut as a tuxedo cummerbund. He'll reach into a row of wispy onion tops and tug an Italian 'Purple Torpedo' onion loose from the soil—these will star in salads, roasts and silky onion-topped flatbreads once the cool weather hits. Finally, he'll introduce you to the tiny green plants that are just poking their heads through the dirt, promising something green for him to work into winter's traditional rotation of heavy starches, root veggies and meats.

"These winter crops are waiting for the cold to snap and then they'll come up. These are all the kales and collard that will winter. By the time spring comes, they'll be about this tall," he says, marking the plants' future height at his hip. "As long as we don't get a hard winter, I should be able to come out here and pick all through the winter from the kales, collards and chards."

In the farm's greenhouse, Scheehser peeks into baskets of bulbous cipollini onions that he is drying to lengthen their shelf life. Likewise,



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he'll soon harvest the rows of tomatoes and pepper plants that fill the greenhouse aisles so the kitchen staff can preserve them and extend the summer season into winter. Last year, they put up some 1,000 quarts of tomatoes alongside the onions, potatoes and fruits that Scheehser stores in the restaurant's root cellar every year.

"The big part is learning how to bring this season into the next. Peppers will be pickled and used in the fall, and when they were in season we pickled asparagus. We haven't even gotten into them yet," he says. "We'll oven dry tomatoes and put them away. We'll process tomatoes. We'll make green tomato relish and chutney and tomato-orange marmalade."

Back in the kitchen at Trellis, Scheehser's staff moves quickly to preserve the produce he brings back while it's at its peak. Scheehser greets his hard-working staff and disappears in the walk-in, returning with tubs of pickled asparagus, carrots and onions that he shows off like a proud papa introducing his brood. Then, he pulls out his bright tomato-orange marmalade and sweet onion marmalade that will adorn cheese plates and flatbreads during the rainy months, and a few bags from the stash of 300 pounds of frozen strawberries he's reserved for off-season berry desserts.

After spending a few moments in the kitchen, it becomes clear that making the farm-to-table connection is Scheehser's mission as well as his passion. What's exciting is that it has also become a hallmark of the Trellis experience, and a signal to guests that they are dining well.

"Guests are really aware of what they are eating and how they are eating. It is our job as chefs to make sure we are helping them out as much as possible," he says. "We aren't doing any service to our guests if we are just buying things without knowing where they are coming from, when they were harvested, where they were shipped from or if they had chemicals added to them."

Fostering that connection between his kitchen, his farm and his guests is Scheehser's main focus, and the reason he visits his plot daily, if not more. And though farming is a huge time commitment to tack on to his everyday chef duties, Scheehser makes the schedule work because he truly understands the payoff. "You take care of the earth, the plants take care of you and then the ingredients that you have for our guests are amazing," he says. *eS*

#### **Trellis Restaurant**

220 Kirkland Avenue, Kirkland

Reservations: 425.284.5900

Email: [dining@trellisrestaurant.net](mailto:dining@trellisrestaurant.net)

[www.heathmankirkland.com](http://www.heathmankirkland.com)

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*A former Seattleite, Ashley Gartland now lives in Portland where she works as a freelance writer. She writes about food, drinks and lifestyle of the Pacific Northwest and has previously been published in Northwest Palate, Edible Portland, and Seattle Metropolitan.*



## Red Onion Marmalade

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**Recipe courtesy Brian Scheehser, Trellis restaurant**

Makes about 3.5 pints | Start to finish: One hour

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| 1 pint orange juice                  | In a small saucepan over medium heat, reduce the orange juice to 1/2 cup. Remove from heat and set aside.   |
| 5 red onions, diced                  |   |
| 1/2 cup olive oil                    | In a large saucepan over medium high heat, combine the onions and olive oil, and cook until the onions are translucent.   |
| 1/2 lb. sugar                        | Stir the sugar, and continue cooking the onions until they're light brown and slightly caramelized. Adjust heat to medium low, add red wine, orange zest and thyme leaves, and simmer slowly until the liquid is reduced by half. |
| 1 cup red wine                       |   |
| Zest of 2 oranges                    |   |
| Leaves from six full sprigs of thyme |   |
| 1 cup wildflower honey               | Add reduced orange juice and honey, and simmer for five additional minutes.   |
|                                      | Remove from heat and cool. Pack into sterile half-pint or pint jars.  |

**Vegetarian • Gluten-free**

## Trellis Potato Rolls

**Recipe courtesy Brian Scheehser, Trellis restaurant**

Makes 18 rolls | Start to finish: 45 minutes plus two rises

Packed with fresh herbs and rustic flecks of potato, these rolls require two trusty baker's ingredients: a scale and fresh yeast.  
Don't be intimidated!

6 ounces whole milk	Combine the milk, salt and 1 1/4 ounces of sugar in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Heat just until the sugar and salt dissolve. Remove from the heat and add the olive oil. The mixture should be no warmer than 105 degrees.
1 tablespoon plus 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt	
1-1/4 ounces sugar	
3 ounces extra virgin olive oil	Using the paddle attachment of a stand mixer, mash the potato, thyme, chives, parsley and rosemary in the mixer bowl. Stir the yeast-sugar mixture into the potato water until dissolved. Pour both the warm milk mixture and the potato water mixture into the mashed potato, and blend on low speed just to combine.
1 12-ounce russet potato, baked and cooled to room temperature	
1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme	
1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives	Switch to the dough hook and add the flour. Knead for 10 minutes on medium speed, scraping down the bowl occasionally. Place in a bowl coated with nonstick spray, and use some additional spray on top of dough. Cover the bowl and refrigerate overnight.
1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley	
1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary	
1 1/2 tablespoons fresh yeast, combined with 1 teaspoon sugar	The next day, spray muffin pans with pan spray. Flour a wooden cutting board. Flatten dough and fold it over onto itself 3 times (like a letter); then roll out the folded dough until the sheet is 1/2-inch thick. Cut the dough into 2-1/2-inch wide strips, then cut strips into pieces 1 1/2-inches long.
6 ounces potato water*	
1 pound, 7 ounces bread flour	Fold pieces in half and place two pieces in each muffin cup, with the folded edges of each piece touching the bottom of the cup. Cover the pans with oiled plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature until doubled, approximately 1 1/2 hours.
1 egg, beaten with 1 tablespoon water	
Coarse sea salt for sprinkling	Preheat oven to 350 degrees, using the convection setting if you have one. Brush rolls with egg wash and sprinkle with coarse sea salt. Bake for 17-20 minutes, until golden brown. Remove from muffin pans and cool on a wire rack.

\*For potato water, cook one medium potato in 9 ounces of water until completely soft. Strain through a coarse strainer. Lightly press some of the potato through the strainer to add some texture to the potato water. Let cool to 105 degrees.

**Vegetarian**

