



Country Matters, Classic Zucchini and Making Wild Wines ...

Check out these books on some of our favorite things, the country, zucchini and wild wines

Country Matters

Of all the country-living yarns I've read, Michael Korda's memoir, *Country Matters*, was certainly the easiest to read and the most enjoyable. Korda, editor-in-chief of Simon and Schuster and bestselling author, along with his wife, Margaret, take leave from their New York City apartment when they purchase a farmhouse in Dutchess County, N.Y.

Country Matters details the couple's transformation from city slickers to full-time hobby farmers, as each chapter unfolds a different aspect of this progression. From "Murphy's Law"-type home fiascos to property-use disputes to Great Gatsby-esque visitors from the City to their acquisition of pigs (the key to country acceptance in his opinion), Korda goes about the business of telling it like it was. I found myself smiling at passages that uncovered some kind of country fluke like when repairmen would show up to do a job, but never return. "You always knew that whenever a workman stood up, stretched his back, and said he'd have to go down to the hardware store for a left-handed clevis, that was it for the day."

However, despite all of the headaches, the Kordas' love for their new life ultimately shines through in the pages. Margaret is able to cultivate her equestrian eventing career by moving her horse to their 20-acre property (and occasionally hosting events there), and Michael is able to work his literary career from the relative serenity of the country. Since this is a memoir, not a novel, I felt more connected to its words and they filled me with a great sense of satisfaction... There they were, the big-city couple, living the "charmed" rural life happily. Yes!

For an honest-to-God true assessment of a city-to-country transformation, don't miss *Country Matters*. It will entertain as well as inform, and I promise, be very hard to put down!

—KKA

The Classic Zucchini Cookbook

Zucchini is bountiful this time of year—whether it's the local fresh market or the generous offerings from friendly neighbors. From green varieties so dark as to be near black, to lighter shades and those of yellow, with and without stripes or speckled, during the warm months, farmers and gardeners are knee-deep in zucchini, as well as other summer squashes.

But what to do with this "dull" vegetable that doesn't pack much of a taste punch? Well there's much ado about squash, including zucchini, if you're willing to get a little creative in the kitchen using *The Classic Zucchini Cookbook* by Andrea Chesman as your guide.

Squash never tasted so good. *The Classic Zucchini Cookbook* provides 225 recipes for "all kinds of squash." The book, first published in 1977 as *Garden Way's Zucchini Cookbook* by Nancy C. Ralston and Marynor Jordan, proves that you can never have too much of a good thing. Whether it's a recipe for Creamy Yellow Summer Squash Soup or Zucchini Chocolate Crinkle cookies, squash doesn't disappoint. *The Classic Zucchini Cookbook* has got you covered from chayote to zucchini in the summer and acorn to turban in the winter, and every variety in between.

In addition to recipes, *The Classic Zucchini Cookbook* offers lots of squash tips and facts. For instance, it turns out that zucchini is often incorrectly prepared which has led to the misnomer that it is a tasteless, albeit nutritious, vegetable. The authors suggest combining sliced zucchini with coarse salt for approximately 30 minutes (one tablespoon of salt per two medium-sized zucchinis). Then prior to cooking, drain the zucchini, wrap in a clean dishtowel and wring as tightly as you can. According to Molly Stevens, food writer and culinary instructor, "It's amazing what this does for zucchini." Other fun and useful information from the book includes a primer to squash varieties, different cooking methods, freezing, pickling and preserving, as well as growing and harvesting.

Like squash, *The Classic Zucchini Cookbook* is best when shared with others. It's the type of book that friends and family will enjoy pouring through together. The recipes are surprisingly tasty and fun, too good to keep to one's self. Chesman succinctly makes the point, "It is my hope that armed with this cookbook, you will have as much fun in the kitchen as I have had, and that your friendships are always enriched and never strained by an abundance of zucchini..."

—TM

Making Wild Wines & Meads

About 10 years ago a friend gave me a bottle of homemade coffee liqueur as a Christmas present. The bottle was pretty



with its unusual ornamentation, adorning holiday ribbon and dark, syrupy contents. To this day, that bottle sits on a shelf next to some of my favorite books. Whenever I see it, I am reminded of Andrea and her thoughtfulness.

That bottle of coffee liqueur also makes me think about the process of making and enjoying homemade spirits. For me it conjures up a candle-lit Old World ambiance: handed-down secret recipes, dark cellars with heavy smells of oak and fermenting potions, celebratory toasts before big feasts, dancing and singing.

After reading *Making Wild Wines & Meads, 125 Unusual Recipes Using Herbs, Fruits, Flowers & More*, by mother-and-son-team Pattie Vargas and Rich Gulling, fortunately I'm still in that dark, pungent cellar, waiting for the celebration to begin. The book stirs my imagination and persuades me to try my hand at a craft that has endured for thousands of years.

What I especially liked about *Making Wild Wines & Meads* is that it's not just another winemaking how-to. While there is excellent step-by-step instruction, the book emphasizes "unusual recipes using herbs, fruits, flowers & more." Marigold, dandelion and blueberry wines, or clove metheglin and cherry melomel are just a few of the delights. No matter what you might be growing in your garden, *Making Wild Wines & Meads* has a recipe to suit your crops.

Think it takes a big investment to get started in winemaking? On the contrary, the basic equipment doesn't go much beyond a soup kettle and an earthenware crock according to the authors. Simplicity is what readers of *Making Wild Wines & Meads* get. The book breaks down the mystery of winemaking with chapters dedicated to the type of wine or mead you are interested in: fruit, herb, flower, nut or vegetable (ever tried carrot wine?). A chapter on wine coolers and punches is also provided featuring recipes that can be adapted (using a little creativity and store-bought alcohol) by non-winemakers as well. *Making Wild Wines & Meads* also has a resources chapter and a glossary of winemaking terms for the uninitiated (a mead is a honey-based wine; a metheglin is a wine based on honey and herbs or spices; a melomel wine has a honey and fruit base).

Making Wild Wines & Meads is a fun introduction to home winemaking. Whether you're thinking of bottling for your own use or for gifts, the resulting elixirs are sure to arouse spirits. This book is a keeper.

—TM

Making Wild Wines & Meads, 125 Unusual Recipes Using Herbs, Fruits, Flowers & More, by Pattie Vargas and Rich Gulling (Storey Books, 210 MASS MoCa Way, North Adams, Mass., 01247), 1999, 169 pages, softcover, \$16.95.