



*\*\* Our enhanced logo is now a link to our Newsletter Archives \*\**

Good afternoon and happy Friday. Hasn't it been a glorious week to be in Houston. I haven't been down to the farms as much as I would like, but I do have some great news about the plantings. This week, we have fruits and flowers going in!! I am so grateful to our Farm Consultant, Dr. Joe Novak (check out his [bio](#) here to learn more about his passionate commitment to urban farming) for helping the farmers start – gasp!- Papaya and Figs. They will take a few seasons to mature, but just know, the Farm Share Members will be the first to get any of the harvest! The second most exciting crop that he's helping the farmers plant are flowers, like sunflowers and celosia. It's all a part of bringing variety and quality to our loyal customers.

This week, I want to revisit an article from the first edition of [Sugar & Rice magazine](#) that spotlighted the Farmers of Plant It Forward. "It Was My Dream to Farm Here." – A story of Fresh Soil and New Beginnings, by Zachary Martin got to the root of where some of our farmers came from and their journey to Houston. I hope you enjoy this excerpt about Farmer Roy Lombo

*[Sugar & Rice] When I visited Roy at his Montrose farm in June, he was still in the process of developing the half-acre plot. A short man with the rough, powerful hands of a man used to working outside, Roy's brow is frequently furrowed, as though he is always trying to puzzle out a solution to one problem or another. He walked me around and pointed out some of those problems. The farm still unfenced, someone had walked off with a load of his squash a few nights earlier. Rabbits, birds, and squirrels had decimated his tomato crop. For the time being, only half the property was under cultivation. Two men were digging irrigation lines to ensure he would have enough water to get his crops through the brutal summer, but the poor quality of Houston soil, which necessitates the use of raised garden beds, meant that Roy was still waiting for enough soil, fertilizer, and wooden fencing to make full use of the land.*

*"It was my dream to farm here," Roy told me as he stooped to show me some of the half-eaten tomatoes in their beds. Though it was clear he still held that dream, it must have seemed strange, perhaps even discouraging, to be waiting on trucked-in soil and irrigation lines instead of being able to plant seed directly into the ground.*

*"I was born a farmer," he told me. His father owned nine hectares, on which the family grew radishes, eggplant, corn, and yams, among other vegetables. But when rebels stormed across the countryside in 1996 to depose the Western-backed dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, Roy found himself trapped across the border in Angola after a business trip and unable to make it back to his home country. He applied for refugee status in Angola, but ultimately flew to Russia—"it was a place where I could get a tourist visa," Roy said—when Angola became embroiled in the war as well.*

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*He arrived in Moscow in the middle of winter and made his way to Patrice Lumumba University, named for the first democratically elected president of the Congo, a communist who was deposed and assassinated with the help of Belgium and the United States. Lumumba University had a reputation as a training ground for promising African college students, and during the Soviet era it served as a place where Africans could learn skills—and communist ideology—that they could take back to their home countries.*

*Roy wandered across the snow-packed campus, asking students, “Where can I find people from my country?” One student directed him to a dormitory where a Congolese student was living. Both so he could receive legal status and so the countryman who agreed to take him in could receive a tax break for housing a refugee, Roy visited the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. After a series of interviews, he received a provisional visa. It granted him the ability to work and live in Russia, but only until the United Nations could find a country to grant him permanent residency.*

*As it turned out, that process took more than a decade, as country after country refused to receive refugees and grant Roy and his fellow Congolese a path to citizenship. In the meantime, Roy lived an hour outside of Moscow, worked in a brick factory, and tried to avoid the attacks*

*from skinheads that he said plagued black men in Russia. When word finally came that the UN had made progress on finding places to resettle Congolese refugees, Roy said he “prayed I wouldn’t wind up in another cold place.”*

*In Houston, his wish seems to have been granted, and his dream now is to make enough money to secure the future of his father’s farm land in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which local officials have threatened to seize and place under state control.*

*“I love Houston,” Roy told me when we sat down at Plant It Forward’s warehouse, a low slung building across from a boot factory in southwest Houston. On the day I visited, Roy and the other farmers were busy sorting flying saucer squash, long beans, radishes, beets, French sorrel, and three types of kale among other varieties, and triple washing their arugula (the secret is to place the leaves in mesh bags and tumble dry them in a heatless dryer) for the next day’s market. “I feel like I was born here,” Roy said.*



Thanks again for supporting Plant It Forward and hope you continue to enjoy the abundance of spring vegetable.

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Your abundant vegetables this week are Cherry Tomatoes, Onions, Lettuce Mix, Squash, Sweet Peppers and Swiss Chard. Some may have Dandelion Greens, or as we say 'Dande-Leon'.

## RECIPES

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I've mentioned before that Smitten Kitchen is one of my favorite food blogs. I often bookmark recipes, just to read the stories behind them and these [Potato, Scallions and Kale Cakes](#) were exactly what I wanted to do with my share this week. I was going to substitute swiss chard for the kale, but otherwise just go for it. But then. . . . I went to [Shiv Sagar](#) on Hillcroft for some Indian veg snacks (let me know if you ever want to go!) and I hit the spice store, [Chandrika Masala](#) to explore. The owner is the friendliest, more informative guide to Indian cooking (and skin care). Asking about the different masala blends, he described one that was used in potato cakes. Ding – do you see what I have to do now?? So below is the recipe from Smitten Kitchen, but if you have a chance to pick up some Dabeli Masala and Peanut Chutney, add about 1 ½ Tbsp to the mixture and top with the chutney.

### [potato scallion and kale cakes](#) | Smitten Kitchen

Yield: About 14 to 15 pancakes

12 scallions (mine were very thin; I'd use fewer if yours are on the thick side)  
1 handful kale leaves, rolled in a stack and sliced into very thin ribbons  
2 eggs, lightly beaten  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg (I totally skipped this)  
1/2 teaspoon coarse or kosher salt (use less if your mashed potatoes are already seasoned)  
Freshly ground pepper  
1/3 cup fresh bread crumbs or panko (plain and lightweight)  
1 1/2 cups cold leftover mashed potatoes  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Clean and trim the scallions, leaving about 2 inches of green stems; I reserved the darker green tops for garnish and salad additions. Cook in boiling water until tender, about 5 minutes. Drain, wring out well, and chop finely. Place the scallions in a medium-sized bowl, add the kale, eggs, nutmeg (if using), salt, pepper, bread crumbs and potatoes and stir to combine. The batter will be loose and wet; this is just fine.

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Heat the oils in a large skillet over medium-high heat until very hot but not smoking. Use about 2 tablespoons batter (I used a cookie scoop that holds slightly less) per pancake, flattening them as they hit the pan. Cook until golden brown underneath, just a couple minutes, before flipping them and cooking them on the reverse side until golden and crisp as well. Drain on paper towels, but be gentle as they are still fragile. You can keep them warm in a 200 degree oven while cooking off the rest of the batter, adding more oil as needed and letting pan cool between batches if it gets too hot.

Serve scattered with reserved scallion stems, if desired, topped with a [crispy egg](#) or alongside a dollop of sour cream or plain yogurt. They also make a wonderful meal with a big salad. Leftovers keep well in the fridge for a few days.

## Swiss Chard and Peppers

This is an improvised recipe from this week that I was pretty happy with. Sorry the measurements are more exact, but I tend to cook in small batches, so upscale for yourself.

1/3 bunch of swiss chard, roughly chopped.  
1/2 onion, sliced into 1/8 in slices  
2 Sweet Peppers (Hungarian Waxed), sliced into 1/8 in slices  
2 T fresh squeezed orange juice  
Pinch of crushed red pepper  
Salt  
Olive Oil

Heat the oil in a saute pan and add the onion and peppers. Saute until softened. Add the chard and cook until it starts to blend with the onions and peppers. Add a pinch of crushed red pepper and salt. Stir, then add the orange juice. Stir to combine, but then let it simmer until the juice is absorbed and gets a little caramelized. Serve warm.

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