

Below is an excerpt from the Sugar & Rice, Issue 1 article on the Plant It Forward Farmers, by Zachary Martin

Guy's story



Guy, who has a bright, round, ever-smiling face, is originally from Congo-Brazzaville, which gained independence from France in 1960. His father was a minister in the cabinet of Pascal Lissouba, who was deposed in a 1997 coup. It is fitting, perhaps, that Guy has wound up in Houston, the economic capital of the U.S. energy sector. The coup that forced him and his family to flee the capital and hide in the countryside was, by many accounts, a proxy war fought over competing American and French oil interests in the region. “France was still smarting from the defeat of Mobutu” in the Democratic Republic of Congo, an anonymous African diplomat told the *New York Times* in 1997. “With all of the oil wealth in that little country, there was no way France was going to allow itself to lose Brazzaville too.” It is widely believed that France backed the rebel forces led by Denis Sassou Nguesso as he led the ouster of the U.S.-backed Lissouba.

For almost two years, Guy and his family lived in his wife’s village, a rural enclave well away from the capital. It was at this time that he began farming: onions, peanuts, corn, beans, tomatoes, and manioc. But by early 1999, Guy and his family were on the run again.

When mercenaries sped through his village, guns blazing, in April of that year, Guy and his family, along with all the other residents of the

village, started living in the woods for safety. For two months they moved between hiding in the mosquito-ridden forest, risking malaria and other diseases, and trying to maintain a semblance of normal life by continuing to plant and harvest crops.

By June, the situation had become untenable. On a Sunday morning at 5 a.m., Guy recalled, rebel and government forces engaged one another in a firefight at the edge of the village, and Guy and his family fled. They stayed a few days ahead of the fighting, moving slowly toward the Gabonese border. Guy ventured out to search abandoned villages for food to supplement their diet of wild fish and game. It took them more than two weeks to walk to the border, where they found the Gabonese military had orders not to let them cross.



While waiting in limbo at the border, rebels came looking for men to press into service as soldiers. Guy was stopped and, when he refused to take up arms, was beaten for two hours. “I have a big family,” he tried to tell them—he had two children at time; he now has five—“I’m old. Let me take my family away and I’ll come back and fight.”



Ultimately, they let him go. After an international refugee organization negotiated for his passage into Gabon, the situation was scarcely better. The Gabonese military threatened constantly to send him back across the border, and Gabonese law enforcement often attacked Congolese refugees. Guy's wife was assaulted.

Sugar & Rice, Issue 2 can be found at Down House, D&T Drive Inn, Blacksmith, Greenway Coffee, Revival Market, Antidote, Black Hole, Brazos Bookstore, Southside Espresso, Hello-Lucky, Eatsie Boys, Settlement Goods, B&N River Oaks.

Guy is still a Plant It Forward Farmer but instead of working on a Plant It Forward Farm he is working at [Coltivare](#), an Italian restaurant that opened in Houston Heights in the spring of 2013. Coltivare was opened by Revival Market owners Ryan Pera and Morgan Weber. Guy works as a chef in the Coltivare kitchen and tends to the garden adjacent to the restaurant which supplies both Coltivare and Revival Market. Coltivare is on White Oak Street and when you visit you can take a stroll through their raised-bed garden. Guy is also attending Culinary School.

“I never thought in my life that I would live in Gabon,” Guy told me. He felt abandoned. He saw families fall apart, children orphaned or abandoned, wives resigned to prostitution. It isn't clear how much longer he could have held out if he hadn't met a chef at a hotel restaurant who needed a dishwasher.

For months Guy and his family lived in a broom closet with a single mattress on the floor. Guy eventually worked his way up to server, and then to sous chef, a position which paid him \$35 a month. When the chef who had hired him gave his two weeks' notice, he told the owner and the kitchen staff, “Guy is going to be the chef now.” Guy moved his family into the chef's former residence and his salary was bumped up to \$200 a month. Not too much later, the chef paid for Guy to attend a year-long culinary program at the Hotel Intercontinental and gave his family permission to begin farming out back of the hotel.

“The farm was at the bedroom window,” he said, and it was the first thing he saw when he got up in the morning. He stopped buying fruits and vegetables for the restaurant and created a new menu based on what he was growing on the farm. This was a sea change for his customers. “Salad,” he told me, expressing a view widely held in Central Africa, “is for white people in the capital.”

Without necessarily knowing it, Guy had created one of the first farm-to-table restaurants in Central Africa. “A chef can be a farmer,” he is fond of saying, “and a farmer can be a chef.” Within five years he plans to have both a farm and a restaurant here in Houston.

# RECIPES

This week's bountiful vegetable is the yellow French filet bean or haricots jaunes. Beautiful, bright color, sweet, and crunchy- you can either cook these little yellow gems, chop them up and add them to salads, or munch on them for snacks. I also give 1-2 of these to my dog for treats and she loves them! There is no need to snap the ends off each one. Just cook them with the ends and enjoy!

## Green (yellow) bean casserole

By: Chef Nik Botello

1 medium sized flying saucer squash (cubed)  
¼ head radicchio (cut into thin slices)  
½ medium onion (chopped small)  
3 medium white mushrooms (thinly sliced)  
2 leaves of sorrel (tore or rough chopped)  
¼ green bell pepper (cubed)  
12 oz. of yellow beans, chopped  
½ small can of cream of mushrooms  
¼ bag crispy fried onions

Fajita seasoning  
Garlic powder  
Ground coriander  
Salt and pepper  
Mrs. Dash seasoning

Sauté the squash, onions, chopped filet beans and radicchio. Sprinkle a little of each seasoning when the vegetables begin to "sweat" or release liquid. Quickly remove from the pan and transfer into an oven safe baking dish or casserole.

While your skillet is still hot, sauté your mushrooms with the sorrel. Again season the mushrooms and sorrel with the seasonings listed. When the mushrooms are fully cooked add to the baking dish.

The green beans should be strained then added to your cooked veggie mixture.

Add the cream of mushrooms to the veggie mixture. Taste the mixture and consider adding more seasonings.

Top the casserole with fried onions and bake at 375 for about 30 to 45 minutes.

## Haricots Jaunes Salad with Pecans and Blue Cheese

Kosher salt  
1/2 lb. yellow French filet beans, cut into 1/2-inch pieces  
1 Tbs. Champagne vinegar  
1/4 tsp. Dijon mustard  
Freshly ground black pepper  
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil  
1/2 cup pecans, toasted and coarsely chopped  
1/2 cup dried cranberries  
1-1/4 oz. (1/4 cup) crumbled blue cheese, preferably Danish  
2 handfuls of arugula

Bring a 4-quart pot of salted water to a boil. Boil the haricots jaunes until crisp-tender, about 4 minutes. Drain in a colander and cool under cold running water; pat dry. (Continue with the recipe or refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 2 days.)

Whisk the vinegar, mustard, and a pinch each of salt and pepper in a large bowl. Whisk in the oil until emulsified. Add the arugula, haricots jaunes, pecans, cranberries, and blue cheese and gently toss to combine. Lightly season with salt and pepper.

[Haricots jaunes salad with arugula and tomato.](#)

Vinaigrette

¼ cup olive oil  
3 Tbsp. Sherry vinegar  
3 Tbsp. Red wine vinegar  
2 Tbsp. Maple Syrup  
1 Tbsp. Old style, whole grain mustard  
Zest of 1 lime  
Salt and pepper

Salad

Yellow French filet beans, blanched  
1 ½ cups of cherry tomatoes, but in half  
2 cups arugula  
¼ cup fresh cilantro

Vinaigrette

Mix all of the ingredients in a bowl except the olive oil. Slowly drizzle the olive oil into the bowl while quickly whisking

Salad

In a salad bowl, mix all of the ingredients. Pour in the vinaigrette dressing and mix well.

Check out our [Newsletter Archive](#) for additional recipes.



Plant It Forward Assistant Farm Manager, Constant, harvesting Swiss Chard.



Swiss chard showing off its beautifully colored stems.

### Swiss Chard with Red Lentils and Carrots

4 to 6 servings

1 Tbsp. olive oil  
1 medium yellow onion, diced  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 cup vegetable stock  
1 cup carrots, sliced, reserve a few slices for garnish  
1 cup red lentils, cooked  
1 cup brown lentils, cooked  
2 cups brown rice, cooked  
Sea salt to taste  
Freshly ground black pepper to taste  
¼ tsp. cayenne  
2 cups Swiss chard, chopped and steamed  
½ cup cherry tomatoes for garnish, sliced

Cook brown rice according to package directions. You will need 2/3 cups dry rice to yield 2 cups cooked. Cook lentils according to package directions. You will need ½ cup of each type of lentil to yield 1 cup cooked. Steam the Swiss chard on medium heat for about 10 minutes.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat and sauté the onion and garlic until the onion is translucent. Add the vegetable stock, carrots, lentils, rice, salt, pepper, and cayenne, and simmer, covered for 10-15 minutes.

Place the lentil rice mixture into a mold (small bowl will work), invert onto plate forming a mound, and cover with Swiss chard. Garnish with carrots and tomatoes.

-Anti-arthritis, Anti-inflammation Cookbook: Healing Through Natural Foods, by: Dr. Gary Null

## Frittata with Swiss Chard (Frittata di Beito)

This Italian recipe is from Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian cookbook. You can also use beet greens, spinach, arugula, etc. in place of the Swiss chard.

### For the Swiss Chard

1 bunch Swiss chard, coarsely chopped  
(use both stems and leaves)  
2 Tbsp. olive oil  
1 garlic clove, peeled and finely chopped  
About ¼ tsp. salt

### For the eggs

6 eggs  
¼ tsp. salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

To prepare the chard, bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil, as if you were boiling pasta. Drop in the chard and boil for 3 to 4 minutes, or until it is tender. Drain. Rinse under cold water and then squeeze out as much moisture as you can.

Put the 2 Tbsp. olive oil and garlic in a non-stick frying pan or sauté pan and set over medium-high heat. When the garlic starts to sizzle, add the greens and about ¼ tsp. salt (taste as you go) and mix well. Stir and cook for about 1 minute. Turn off the heat.

Put eggs into a medium bowl and beat them well. Add the salt, pepper to taste, and chard. Mix well, separating the chard pieces.

Put the 3 Tbsp. olive oil into a nonstick, omlette-type frying pan with a metal handle (about 10 in. at the top and 7 in. at the bottom) and set over medium-low heat. Stir the egg mixture in the bowl and pour it in, swirling the pan to spread it evenly. Cover and cook for 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, preheat the broiler.

When eggs have cooked for 5 minutes, turn the heat down to low and cook another 5 minutes. Uncover the frying pan and put it under the broiler for about 2 minutes, or until the top has set. It should go on the top or second to top oven rack. Slide the frittata onto a serving plate and serve hot.

Is there something in your farm share that you cannot identify? Take a snapshot and send me the picture. I will identify it for you and then add it to the newsletter to help your fellow members.