

Arts/Living

Book highlights 'Out of the Earth' recipes

By PAMELA G. BROWN
Special to The Chronicle

WESTPORT - They come from out of the earth, as red as garnets, as green as emeralds, and as gold as

topaz. No, the subject is not fine gemstones, but fine fruits and vegetables, like the fine produce grown on farms on the Heritage Farm Coast.

A new book celebrates those glorious tomatoes, squashes, and berries. And it all began with a turnip. "We wanted to do a book to promote the Macomber turnip," said author Kerry Downey Romaniello. "We met with the people at Spinner Publications, and decided that there is so much more here."

The result was *Out of the Earth*, a combination cookbook, biography of local farmers, and testament to the need to preserve farmland in the area. There are recipes as well as interviews with local growers, and an entire chapter dedicated to the agricultural "star" of the area, the Macomber turnip.

"We want to educate and inform residents about the richness of the agriculture in the area, both now and in the future," Ms. Romaniello said. "This is not your standard cookbook. The focus is on the growers. I want people to know what they (the growers) are all about. There are no pictures of finished dishes, just of the growers and the produce."

The book's chapters focus on individual crops and the farmers that grow them on the Heritage Farm Coast, which includes the southern portions of Bristol and Plymouth counties in Massachusetts and the Sakonnet Bay region of southeastern Rhode Island. It is an area where agriculture is simultaneously famous and threatened. Westport has the most dairy farms in the state, and Bristol County is the number one county in vegetable production in the state.

In her introduction, Ms. Romaniello noted that like other agricultural areas, the Heritage Farm

Coast is threatened by residential and commercial development. And in his article, "Moving Toward a Sustainable Future," Bob Russell stated that in the past 30 years, the region has lost one-third of its open space and farmland.

"In most cases when water is pol-

remedied," he wrote. "Once land is used for development, it is impossible to reverse. Once land is gone, it is gone as a natural resource."

Besides the beauty of the open space created by farmland, agriculture also feeds a strong local economy, Mr. Russell said, which in turn feeds a strong economy nationwide. "Every dollar (farming, fishing, mining, and forestry) generate multiplies itself five to seven times in the economy. No other industry does this," he wrote.

Ms. Romaniello has another reason for buying and eating local produce: good health. The shorter the distance food travels from garden to table the better. "The moment something is picked, it starts losing vitamins," she said. "Buy extra when you go to the market and can it or freeze it. Then you can eat healthy all year long without buying imported food."

The recipes come from the growers themselves, chefs from the Chefs Collaborative, 2000, and from area residents. "They were chosen for their simplicity and the ease of acquiring the ingredients," she said.

Out of the Earth is the first in the series of books Ms. Romaniello is writing. From the Sea is next on the schedule, and that will be followed by *In the Neighborhood*, which will focus on the ethnic diversity of the area and its food.

Crunchy Corn Salsa
From John George, Jr., John George Farm

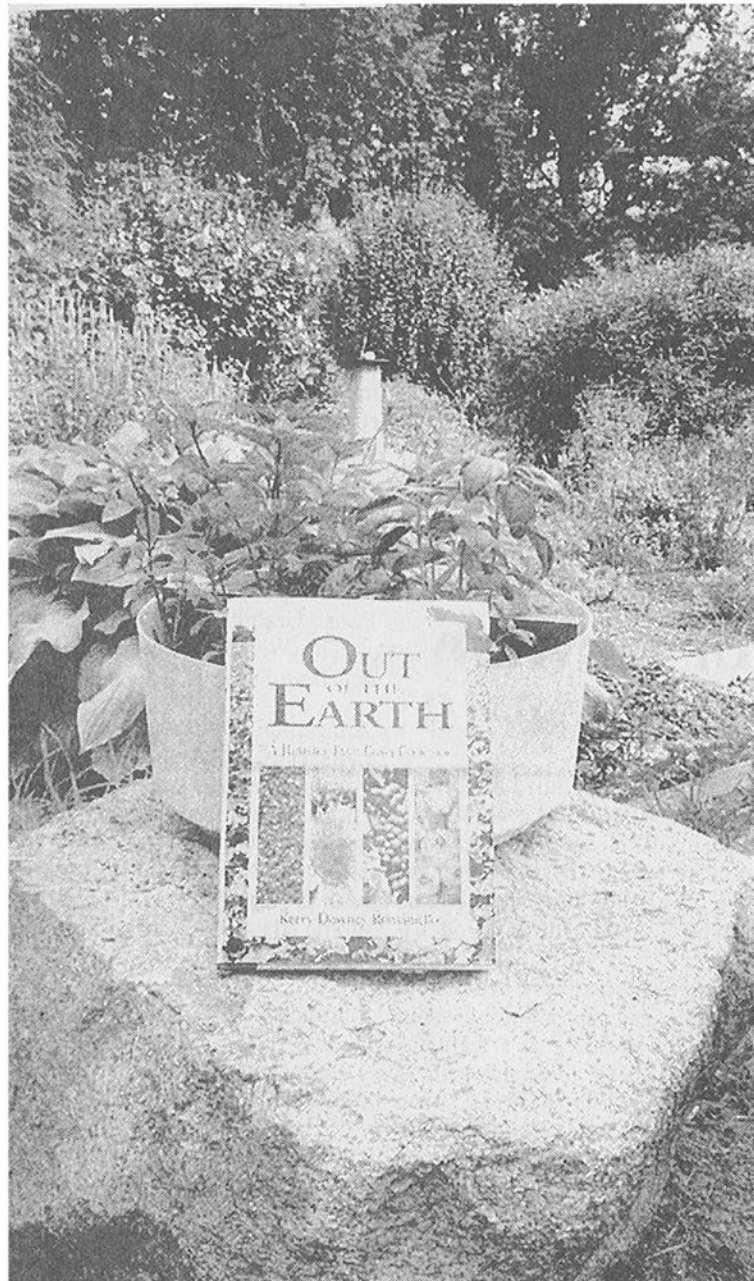
3 ears fresh corn
3 fresh roma tomatoes
1 cucumber, split lengthwise and seeds scooped out

1-4 jalapeno peppers, minced (degree of heat is up to you)
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 teaspoon fresh cilantro
1 teaspoon fresh parsley
salt

Shave the corn off the ear and place in a glass or stainless steel bowl. Finely chop tomatoes and cucumber and add to corn. Toss in peppers, juice, and herbs, and mix well. Cover and let macerate (soak)

for 15 minutes. Season to taste with salt. Serve with grilled or baked meat, chicken, fish, or chips. Makes about 2 cups.

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KERRY DOWNEY ROMANIELLO, Westport chef and author, will be signing her book on August 22 from 3 to 5 p.m. at Partners Village Store, 999 Main Road. (Chronicle Photo by Pamela G. Brown)



KERRY DOWNEY ROMANIELLO is the author of "Out of the Earth." (Chronicle Photo by Pamela G. Brown)