

INTERNATIONAL GUIDE TO OUR 100 FAVORITE RESTAURANTS

Robb Report

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• DINING •

Cultivated Risks

Chefs tempt fate and their patrons by relying on their own gardens for produce.

THE GARDEN AT ARROWS, the Ogunquit, Maine, restaurant run by chefs Clark Frasier and Mark Gaier, offers pleasure for both the eye and the belly. The three-quarter-acre plot is the source of at least half of the chefs' ingredients in early spring and late fall. And in summer, just about every component of any meal has its roots there. During the Arrows' nine months of operation (from April through December), Frasier, Gaier, and their team of chefs and gardeners harvest a bounty worthy of the best farm stands: radicchio, spinach, arugula, baby carrots, turnips, parsley, lemongrass, mustard, cabbage, onions, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, eggplants, tomatillos, bell peppers in a rainbow of colors, squash, green beans, yellow beans, blueberries, edible flowers, and nine varieties of tomatoes, among other items.

It is an impressive yield for a New England garden, and a pricey one. Frasier and Gaier estimate that maintaining the garden costs them more than \$100,000 per year. They say it makes sense to grow their herbs, fruits, and vegetables only if the produce is equal to or better than what they could obtain from a vendor. "The garden is not decorative. It needs to produce," says Gaier. "It must provide the real thing for the restaurant."

Arrows is among the few elite restaurants that accept the risk of growing their own ingredients in a region where the weather can be uncooperative. The Herbfarm in Woodinville, Wash., is another. The Herbfarm originally was just that: an herb farm. The namesake restaurant was opened in 1986 to showcase the farm's products. Head gardener Bill Vingelen grows about 100 herbs at the on-site, 6,000-square-foot garden, and he grows additional herbs and vegetables in a three-acre plot about a mile away from the restaurant. Depending on the time of

year, from 40 percent to 80 percent of the dinner ingredients come from the gardens.

The gardeners at Arrows and at Herbfarm speak often with the chefs, warning them if, for instance, the green beans will ripen two days too early or the purple cauliflower is

failing to thrive. Discussions cannot avert every problem, however. "It takes a lot of communication," says Herbfarm co-owner Carrie Van Dyck, "but Mother Nature will do what she wants, even though you plan differently." Recently, Herbfarm chef Keith Luce deemed a crop of garden beets too bitter and purchased replacements from a local farm. "That is a rare case, but it does happen," says gardener Vingelen. "Flavor and texture are more important than the fact that we grew it ourselves."

Tomatoes have posed problems for Arrows' Frasier. "Seven years ago, we had a spectacular tomato crop coming up," he recalls. "Then I came in one morning and the assistant gardener was in tears. One whole row had gone black with blight, and within three days, it had destroyed the entire crop. It was devastating. We did all the stuff we needed to make them grow properly, and to have them go, and go so fast, was a horrifying experience."

Tomato tragedies aside, Frasier does not doubt the value of the Arrows garden. "When you can harvest lettuce in the afternoon, wash it, and have it on a plate hours later, the vibrance is palpable," he

says. "You don't even have to eat it; you can see it and smell it. It's so much more intense. That's what you want as a chef, that vibrance." —SHEILA GIBSON STOODLEY

Arrows, 207.361.1100, www.arrowsrestaurant.com; The Herbfarm, 425.485.5300, www.theherbfarm.com

The gardens of the Herbfarm in Woodinville, Wash., yield some of the ingredients for winter squash ravioli with sage butter.



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