

# Spoonfuls of Value

The Perfect Purée of Napa Valley, LLC

Nutritious fruit and vegetable purées breathe flavor and color into a dish.

By Jody Shee

**CONSIDERING** all the shades and flavors of fruits and vegetables, imagine what you could do to common dishes and plate presentations if you just added a dab of produce purée.

Some chefs have already imagined, and they are coming up with impressive pastes and mashes that any chef could do. All it takes is a blender and that imagination.

Take condiments. Chef/author/instructor Dave Martin recently developed prickly pear mustard, lychee/sweet chili aioli and Caribbean pink guava ketchup for New York's The Frying Dutchmen, a new food truck that features Belgian and sweet potato fries with 20 specialty sauces.

Using prickly pear purée for the prickly pear mustard, he imparts an electric-pink

color, which he describes as kind of fun, and certainly unique. His Caribbean pink guava ketchup also gives customers something to talk about. Among the ingredients are roasted tomatoes, allspice, nutmeg, balsamic vinegar, pepper, sugar and, of course, pink guava purée.

Encouraging other chefs to create fruit and vegetable purées, Martin urges, "Use your

## COCONUT PANNA COTTA WITH MANGO/PAPAYA SAUCE

The Perfect Purée of Napa Valley, LLC  
Napa, Calif.

Yield: 20 oz.

2 t. powdered gelatin  
2 oz. cold water  
10 oz. coconut purée  
8 oz. heavy cream  
4 drops vanilla extract  
Mango/Papaya Sauce (recipe follows)  
Mint sprig, for garnish

**Method:** Sprinkle gelatin over cold water; set aside. Simmer coconut purée, cream and vanilla for 2 minutes. Whisk in dissolved gelatin. Pour into molds; refrigerate overnight. To unmold, dip molds in warm water or warm slightly with butane torch. Invert on plate. Surround panna cotta with mango/papaya sauce. Garnish with mint.

### Mango/Papaya Sauce

3 oz. mango purée  
3 oz. papaya purée  
2 oz. simple syrup

**Method:** Combine mango purée, papaya purée and simple syrup. Transfer to squeeze bottle or covered storage container. Refrigerate.

own creativity. Explore. Embrace who you are as a chef, and go with that." Martin wrote *Flavor Quest*, Volume 1 (Powell's Books, 2009), and made it to the finals in the first season of Bravo's "Top Chef."

### THE COLOR ANGLE

You may not want to go for the color shock value of a fruit or vegetable, but hue is one of the primary points to a produce purée. In his



Scallops aren't the only delicious thing on the plate at Matthew's Restaurant in Jacksonville, Fla. Chef/owner Matthew Medure also includes English pea purée and sweet corn/hominy purée.

purée that ends up as blackberry barbecue sauce, Yann Chupin, executive chef for The Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation, Greensboro, Ga., finds that blackberries are perfect to give the sauce its deep, dark color. Besides blackberries, it combines the flavors of onions, garlic, chipotle and chili powder along with fresh tomatoes and tomato paste, vinegar, molasses, honey, sweet soy sauce and black pepper.

When he makes his red wine sauce, Chupin likes to add beet purée. The purple of the beets turns darker as it cooks, "and that's what you're looking for in a red wine sauce," he says. To make the sauce, he begins with beet purée and adds balsamic vinegar and a bit of port wine, reduces it and adds veal stock. The beet purée also helps to achieve the desired thickness.

For one of Chupin's purée color secrets, he advises that if you are making a purée out of oranges for a sauce, add a little bit of carrot to ensure a vibrant orange color. "If you add too much, it looks like carrot. But just the right amount and you recover some of the lost color from the cooking process," he says.

A nice velvety sweet corn purée goes well with Maine diver scallops in the opinion of Matthew Medure, chef/owner of Matthew's Restaurant in Jacksonville, Fla. The corn color is enhanced by turmeric that Medure adds to the purée, which naturally fits within the flavor profile of his restaurant's cuisine.

Medure admits that sweet corn is more difficult to purée than other vegetables. Cook it slowly, twice as long as you would cook cauliflower, for example, in olive oil and butter, then add a little vegetable stock, he says. Besides turmeric, he adds salt and white pepper.

Overall, to prevent vegetable discoloration, Medure suggests cooking the vegetables under a lid. "The condensation from the lid drips back down into the pan and prevents coloring. Whites stay white and yellow stays yellow. It's important to stay true to the color," he says.

When making a purée of English peas, Medure finds it hard to keep the brilliant green. After blending, he says he strains it right into ice water, cooling it immediately, which helps retain the color.

# FLAVORS

It's best to make purées just before service, to avoid loss of color, says Bob Burcenski, chef/owner of Tallgrass Restaurant in Lockport, Ill. But if you are making it in the morning, he suggests adding a bit of lemon juice to help hold the color throughout the day.

## CONSIDER FLAVORS

Bolder, more interesting flavor is another produce purée goal, which can be helped by combining flavors. For Burcenski, fresh mint and strawberry combine well in a purée as a Napoleon layer alternated with laced white chocolate.

For a panna cotta flavor twist, he combines sweet red pepper purée and low-fat almond milk, using the panna cotta as a base on which to lay a cold salad of cooked asparagus, feta cheese, hazelnuts and fresh chives puréed with extra virgin olive oil.

The combination of potatoes and celery root creates an unexpected dimension to potato purée. It's a combo Burcenski likes to use as a base on which to set wild fish or organic braised short ribs. "You get the quality of potato purée, but it's not as high in sugars. You cut it over half with celery root, which is very low in sugar," he says. "Plus, celery is a nice clean taste. It enhances the clean taste of a fish."

Martin finds a purée winner in the combination of roasted peaches and plums. He adds cinnamon, lime juice and honey or agave and serves it with mango/apple chicken.

In some cases, herbs are the purée winners. Medure likes to purée herbs with a simple



Yann Chupin

A purée with blackberries gives depth to the blackberry barbecue sauce at The Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation, Greensboro, Ga.

syrup to use with cheese, shellfish or crab cakes, as well as with desserts as a plate garnish. Basil, arugula, mint and parsley are some of his choice herbs for purées.

On the savory side, chef/consultant Charles Mereday of Indianapolis makes herb purées, and for body, adds hot water and boiled, peeled Idaho potato slices. The potato slices have no flavor, so the puréed combination allows the herb, such as basil or cilantro, to shine.

Another flavor standout to Mereday is Meyer lemon purée whisked into beurre blanc sauce to accompany fish and brighten it with a citrus finish.

With pizza, guests would expect a base of tomato sauce or marinara. But Mereday gives pizza a twist with roasted red pepper purée rather than tomato sauce at his restaurant, Eagle Creek Pizza, Indianapolis. He uses it with vegetarian pizza that features goat cheese, vegetables, olives and basil.

## VALUE ADDED FOR CONSISTENCY

While Mereday makes his own roasted red pepper purée most of the time, sometimes the peppers are not in season or are not at their flavor peak. In that case, he buys the purée from The Perfect Purée of Napa

Valley, LLC, Napa, Calif. He believes that the outstanding, consistent, unique purées that are more recently available have inspired chefs to experiment and make purées themselves.

Martin, for his Caribbean pink guava ketchup and prickly pear mustard, purchases the fruit purée from The Perfect Purée. The reasons for buying it versus making it are obvious. "With pink guava, by the time I cook it and make purée, it might cost me triple," he says. "It's not cost-effective to do it myself."

Mango and raspberry are the two most popular purées purchased from The Perfect Purée, says company owner/president Tracy Hayward, who founded the company in 1988. She also notes that ginger, passion fruit, blood orange and caramelized pineapple purées have developed a strong following.

"We source our own fruit from growers around the world and with whom we have had longstanding relationships," she says, adding that the fruits are harvested at the peak of season, puréed and packed frozen. The company uses a HACCP-certified co-packer to manufacture the purées.

While Hayward notes that chefs use the purées for marinades, dips, sauces, ice



## MANGO MOJO SHRIMP

Allen Susser, Chef/Author  
Aventura, Fla.

Yield: 4 servings

- ¼ cup olive oil, divided
- ½ small yellow onion, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ¼ t. dried oregano
- 1 t. ground cumin
- ½ t. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 small lime, freshly squeezed
- Pinch crushed red pepper
- 1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 green (unripe) mangos, diced, divided
- 2 t. kosher salt
- 1 pound jumbo shrimp, peeled, deveined

**Method:** Heat 1 T. olive oil in saucepan over medium heat. Add onion; cook until soft, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic, oregano, cumin, black pepper and lime juice; sauté for 2 minutes. Add crushed red pepper, orange juice, white wine and half the diced mango; season with salt. Bring to a simmer; cook 10 minutes. Cool 5 minutes. Transfer to blender; purée until smooth. Preheat heavy skillet with remaining olive oil. Over high heat, add shrimp to pan; sauté for 1 minute. Add mango mojo and remaining diced mango. Cook until mojo comes to a boil and shrimp turns pinkish-red. Remove from heat; allow shrimp to cook through in mango mojo for 1 minute before serving. Serve on bed of mixed greens or with whole wheat couscous.

*Recipe is courtesy of the National Mango Board.*

cream and candy, among other things, the trendiest use of purées now is in drinks. The concept of fresh ingredients has moved from the kitchen to the bar, and chefs are not satisfied with using flavored syrups and other shelf-stable products with a lot of added ingredients. “Bartenders are now the new personalities moving into the forefront in foodservice,” Hayward says.

Some have, for example, switched up their Bloody Mary, using roasted red bell pepper purée instead of the standard tomato base. Others use raspberry or strawberry purée for flavored lemonades, or mango or prickly pear purée for margaritas.

Tamarind and coconut are two specialty purée flavors that have intrigued chefs lately, Hayward says. Tamarind follows in the Latin cuisine tradition. “Tamarind in chocolate ganache adds a more sophisticated flavor and complexity,” she says. The coconut purée is like whipped cream and has many applications, including for use in a raspberry/coconut colada, or anything tropical.

### TEXTURE

One of the traits of a good purée is the right texture for the right application. How to achieve that is part experience, part art.

Straining the purée through a fine chinois two or three times is Mereday’s advice. “If it

doesn’t reach the right thickness, you can add agar-agar,” he says.

In some savory applications, where the purée serves as more than plate décor, a thicker “meatier” purée might be the right way to go. “In purée, I’m all about texture and keeping the ingredients’ integrity,” says Martin. Therefore, he doesn’t like to overstrain, as in winter parsnip/roasted-garlic purée, on which he places braised short ribs or root beer-braised pork. He also makes a carrot mash, which is half carrot, half potato.

For fruit purées, in particular, he likes a sheen. To achieve that, he’s careful not to overcook the fruit, and he adds 1 teaspoon or 1 tablespoon of butter, depending on the quantity he’s making.

Molecular gastronomy takes purée texture to different levels, such as turning a purée into “caviar,” Mereday says. Or, taking a mango purée and making it into an “egg yolk” on the plate makes a great presentation.

For those who have not done much with fruit and vegetable purées, Chupin suggests making it a matter of imagination. “Think what spices you could put with berries, for example. Then use your instinct in making it. Try it, and perfect it from there.”

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