

# The “R” Word

Today, eating is about respect – for the land, the crops and livestock, the farmer, the chef and ourselves. BY ANNE DIMON

**I**t's a Saturday morning in late May, and Michael Kloeti, his wife and business partner, Laura, and their two sons have grabbed a couple of shovels and a small wooden crate for a day of “ramping.” Respect for food and the environment, and the use of fresh, local ingredients are the foundation of Kloeti's culinary philosophy, and on this day, the Kloeti clan is foraging in the woods for wild leeks, known as ramps.

Kloeti, the head chef and owner of Michael's on the Hill restaurant in Vermont, was born and raised in a small Swiss village by a mother who “loved to cook and knew how.” The family grew herbs and vegetables and raised rabbits, and anything else they needed was within easy reach at the nearby community. “It was a very sustainable existence,” he recalls with fondness.

Kloeti easily remembers the moment, at age 15, when he was bitten by “the call of the kitchen.” Shortly thereafter, he started a four-year apprenticeship as a chef in Switzerland. Fast-forward a few years to the early '90s, when he found himself in New York City, along with his wife, an American who had been completing her own culinary internship in Switzerland. He worked at the Metropolitan Opera, then the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and later at Lespinasse in the St. Regis Hotel.

Not afraid to risk culinary adventures, Kloeti took the opportunity to work as a resort sous chef in Hawaii in 1995, but within two years, another job offer came through. Promptly he returned to New York, this time as the *chef de*



Chef Michael Kloeti forages for wild leeks in the Vermont woods.



Chef Michael Kloeti was named Vermont Chef of the Year in 2007 after just five short years of running Michael's on the Hill restaurant.



Kloeti's 82-seat restaurant Michael's on the Hill.

*cuisine* of the St. Regis Hotel. But wild leeks do not grow everywhere, and the couple's desire to raise a family in a farm community is what finally brought them to Vermont, where in 2002 they opened their 82-seat restaurant, Michael's on the Hill, on a four-acre property about six miles from the town of Stowe. “Vermont has gorgeous chickens, lambs, organic eggs,

and “incredible for pesto.” The onion-like base portion can be used to make leek-and-potato soup, or can be pickled to serve out of season with duck terrine, smoked gouda fritters, or sliced thinly and added to salads.

Of course, ramps are not the only thing on Kloeti's “foraging” menu. Mushrooms, such as morels, chanterelles and even lobster

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potatoes, artisan cheeses and breads,” says Kloeti. “In Switzerland, you take the quality for granted, but here you have to go look for it.”

Just under a half-hour's drive from the restaurant, wild leeks grow abundantly in the middle of the forest in patches wherever the earth has access to both sunlight and plenty of moisture, explains Kloeti, who was named Vermont Chef of the Year by the Vermont Hospitality Council in 2007. The leaves of the scallion-like plant have a slightly spicy flavor, and anything you can do with basil, you can do with ramp leaves, he opines. He further notes that leeks are delicious sautéed and served with fish

mushrooms, find their way to his restaurant, thanks to local “wild crafters” he hires to hunt the fungi. The lobster mushrooms, he says, are bright orange and carry a slight seafood taste, which makes them perfect for lobster-like bisque that is cholesterol-free.

The wild crafters also search for wild asparagus, wild ginger, watercress and fiddleheads, and their finds often surprise Kloeti. “Sometimes,” he says, “one of them will arrive at our back door and say, ‘Look at these great sunchokes that we just found.’” That evening's special will include these wild Jerusalem artichokes as Sunchoke Gratin, or perhaps puréed and served with black truffles and Duck Leg Confit.

PHOTOS OF MICHAEL'S ON THE HILL AND MICHAEL KLOETI PROVIDED BY MICHAEL KLOETI

## Stowe Region for the Wellness-Minded Traveler

Ranked as the top ski area in the Eastern U.S., the Stowe area also offers artisans, antique stores and great mountain trails for hiking and cycling.

### BEST CLEAN EATS

Many restaurants belong to the Vermont Fresh Network and offer dishes made from fresh local ingredients. Here are two we've tried and recommend:

#### NORMA'S AT TOPNOTCH RESORT AND SPA

An emphasis on fresh and local prevails at Norma's, the signature all-day dining room at Topnotch Resort & Spa, where along with good eats, you can enjoy a lovely mountain view. [topnotchresort.com](http://topnotchresort.com)

#### HEN OF THE WOOD AT THE GRIST MILL

This restaurant's environment is unique and the food is fabulous. Leave room for a pick from the cheese menu – with 16 to 20 local artisanal cheeses to choose from (depending on availability), you're sure to find one that suits your tastes. Do as the Europeans do and enjoy your cheese dish just after your entrée, or you can indulge in it right away by ordering it as a starter. [henofthewood.com](http://henofthewood.com)

### BEST SPA

One of the largest and most upscale spas in Vermont, **TOPNOTCH SPA** offers a full range of treatments, daily fitness classes, a fully equipped gym, and indoor and outdoor pools. A day pass costs \$50 and provides access to all spa facilities, including one fitness class and pool time. If you book a treatment, you'll get the same all-day spa access but will have to pay an additional \$15 if you're interested in a class. [topnotchresort.com](http://topnotchresort.com)

### BEST HIKING

The Stowe area offers a network of great hiking trails, but according to Topnotch fitness manager Peter Johnson, the **LONG TRAIL UP TO THE CHIN OF MOUNT MANSFIELD** is one of the best and offers great views. He says it takes an average hiker about 90 minutes to two hours to reach the summit. For an easier hike, he recommends the trail to Sterling Pond. The most popular hike is the Pinnacle Trail. For a more leisurely stroll, bike or rollerblade, try the Stowe Recreation Path – it includes 10 pedestrian bridges crossing the river. [gostowe.com](http://gostowe.com)

### BEST FARMERS' MARKET

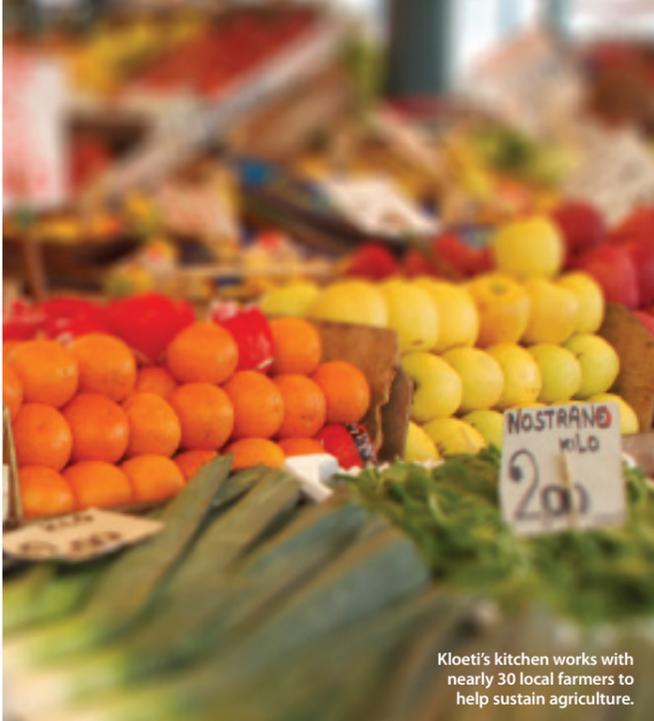
Open Sundays from May to October, **THE STOWE FARMERS' MARKET** features about 40 vendors selling vegetables, flowers, mushrooms, meat (chicken, pork, beef and lamb), cheese, herbs, pickles and relishes. Participating farmers are all local and grow mostly organic. [stowefarmersmarket.com](http://stowefarmersmarket.com)

### FOODIE FESTIVALS

**THE VERMONT CULINARY CLASSIC IN STOWE**, an annual summertime event, celebrates the state's rich culinary heritage with tastings, tours, demonstrations and more. [vermontculinaryclassic.com](http://vermontculinaryclassic.com)

### STOWE WINE AND FOOD CLASSIC

Another annual event that takes place in June, this event is a multi-day attraction that includes a gala dinner, wine tasting and charity auction. [stowefoodandwine.com](http://stowefoodandwine.com)



Kloeti's kitchen works with nearly 30 local farmers to help sustain agriculture.

## Environment Matters

Kloeti is quick to note that a sense of responsibility must accompany foraging. "You've got to understand the plant, the ecosystem, the environment and how not to disturb the cycle of growth," he stresses. "You just can't grab everything you see in a way that nothing grows the following year."

The same applies to the ocean. Along with using fresh local ingredients whenever possible, Kloeti supports responsible choices. He says tuna and swordfish "are over-fished in some seas at four times the speed of their own rate of reproduction." And for that reason, you won't find them on his menu – "not fresh, not canned, not frozen until the problem is solved," he says.

The word "respect" is sprinkled into our conversation like toasted pine nuts into a salad. The Slow Food movement, explains Kloeti, is about learning where food comes from, how it's grown or raised, and how it's prepared, as well as giving "the utmost respect to everyone involved – the farmer, the crops or livestock, the chef and the guest." He acknowledges that it's not easy to invest the time to source and collect local produce instead of simply ordering from a wholesaler. But for Kloeti, respect takes the lead here: His kitchen works with close to 30 farmers within a 50-mile range of the restaurant. He notes with pride, "The farmers respect the land, the animals, the crops; we respect the farmers for what they do, and we respect our customers."

Kloeti's point is that eating provides us with an opportunity to evaluate our lifestyle and consider what impact our choices have on the planet. Packaging, shipping, cooling, repackaging – each leaves a negative imprint. If we take the time to purchase a local farmer's carrots, cabbages or other produce or meat, the food goes from farm to table with much less of an impact on the environment. Kloeti sums it up this way: "When people eat clean, they show a respect for the environment and their own well-being." ©

For more information on Kloeti's restaurant, visit [michaelsonthehill.com](http://michaelsonthehill.com).

## Kloeti's Roasted Mushroom Salad with Arugula & Hazelnuts Serves 6.

As this is a wonderfully easy and delicious way to prepare mushrooms, we urge you to use whatever is local and in season.

### INGREDIENTS:

- ¾ lb crimini mushrooms, cut in quarters (about 8 each)
- ¾ lb oyster mushrooms, stems cut off, cut in large pieces (about 3 bunches)
- ¾ lb shiitake mushrooms, stems cut off, cut in quarters (about 8 large)
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp mixed herbs of choice
- ½ tsp sea salt
- Fresh ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp sherry vinegar
- 3 tbsp hazelnut oil
- ¾ lb arugula
- 2 tbsp hazelnuts, toasted

### INSTRUCTIONS:

**ONE** Preheat oven to 400°F.

**TWO** Gently toss mushrooms, olive oil, herbs, salt and pepper together.

**THREE** Spread evenly on a baking sheet

**FOUR** Roast in the oven for 8 minutes, then mix the mushrooms around. Roast for 6

more minutes until golden brown. Cool until just warm.

**FIVE** In a large bowl, whisk together the vinegar and hazelnut oil, then season with salt and pepper to taste.

**SIX** Add the arugula and hazelnuts and gently toss, then fold in the mushrooms. Serve immediately.

### SERVING SUGGESTION:

Fantastic on its own, you may also enjoy this dish topped with a touch of shaved Asiago cheese or a piece of roasted fish. Some crunchy, multi-grain bread is also a nice addition.

**Nutrients per 1¼-cup serving:** Calories: 199, Total Fat: 13 g, Sat. Fat: 1 g, Monounsaturated Fat: 9 g, Polyunsaturated Fat: 1.5 g, Carbs: 17 g, Fiber: 4 g, Sugars: 5 g, Protein: 6.5 g, Sodium: 192 mg, Cholesterol: 0 mg



### Nutritional Bonus:

This veggie dish is surprisingly an excellent source of vitamin D (almost half your daily supply) thanks to the shiitake mushrooms, one of few non-animal food sources of the sunshine vitamin.