



edible CHICAGO

Our Food, Our Stories, Season by Season

Spice Up the Season

The Foraging Chef

BLACK IS THE NEW GARLIC

Black is the New Garlic

by Becky Liscum

CRAIG DUNEK LIVES AND BREATHES GARLIC—and makes no apologies about it. He’s a scientist, engineer, farmer and entrepreneur who plants and harvests—by hand—thousands of bulbs a season in the organic, rolling fields of southwest Wisconsin. Late in summer, he hangs bunches of garlic to dry in a barn down the road from his house. They dangle from the rafters, beams, posts, even the rungs of a ladder leading to the hayloft. They will be there for as long as eight weeks. Once dried and cured, this crop of pungent bulbs turns into something sweet—black garlic.

“One taste of black garlic and all I wanted to do was tell everyone about it. The flavor is an amazing mix of dates, fig, balsamic and garlic. Black garlic also has a tangy zing and sweetness creating a flavor that is all its own,” he says.

His natural curiosity and scientific training drove him to research what made the garlic turn dark and sweet. He learned that when garlic goes through a fermentation process where heat and bacteria are employed, the cellular structure changes and so does the flavor. “The complex carbohydrates in garlic are broken down into simple sugars leaving the product sweet in flavor, primarily from sucrose and dextrose.” That’s the short answer. The longer one is much more scientific and reminds you

that he was probably the one student in Chemistry class who could rapidly explain a very complicated process with all of its detailed scientific jargon, with enthusiasm.

So enamored by the prospects of spreading black garlic to others, Dunek got down to work. His next question: how could he create this product and sell it? The engineer part of his brain figured it out. He designed and built his own proprietary fermentation system and processing facility on his farm, doing much of the construction himself. “I’m a perfectionist,” he explained.

He created a business, Black Garlic North America with designs on selling his product as far and wide as possible. But he realized he had to educate people about this exotic food item, yet another task he assigned himself.

Black garlic has long been used in Asian culture and is believed to be mentioned in ancient Chinese Tao as a food of immortality. Modern, scientific data also exists; aged garlic extract offers antioxidant properties. Studies published in medical journals, including *Molecular Medicine Reports* and *The Journal of Nutrition*, report that antioxidants found in aged garlic extract can lower the risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer and age-related degeneration.

“Black garlic contains S-Allyl-L-cystein and other potent antioxidants. These

two components result in twice the amounts of antioxidants when compared to fresh garlic,” Dunek explains. During a two-stage fermentation process, the compounds responsible for the pungent smell of fresh garlic are removed. What remains are the ones that produce the sweet taste, a surprise for most people who sample it for the first time.

Fermented garlic is also considered a savory, with chefs using it in a variety of ways, from appetizers to desserts, even in ice cream. “Black garlic pairs very well in dips and spreads with cream cheese, in vinaigrettes, and in food that can sometimes be bland in flavor such as macaroni salad. Whole cloves on top of pizza is a great place to use black garlic as well,” says Dunek.

He shares his enthusiasm for black garlic with customers at farmers markets in Chicago. He hopes they will have the same reaction he did when he first tasted it. Most people, though, wouldn’t be as inclined as he was to take the time to engineer a way to ferment it into the sweet product he sells. His scientific mind is usually a step ahead and always looking for a cutting edge product. “My dream was to own my own business where I could control quality to meet and exceed customer expectations, while at the same time selling something that was truly different. However, I never would have guessed it would be black garlic.” **ec**



For a full list of Black Garlic NA products or to purchase, visit blackgarlicna.com. Free shipping is available.

Look for a Black Garlic breakfast stirfry recipe on page 48.

Becky Liscum is a co-publisher and co-editor of Edible Chicago. When she is not writing about food and farmers, she is likely working on a video about interesting folks in the local food community for her production company, Story Buzz Media.

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Black Garlic Breakfast Stir Fry

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adapted from Craig Dunek, serves 3-4

- 4 strips bacon
- Olive oil
- 1/4 pound Shiitake mushrooms, sliced into 1/4 inch pieces
- 1 medium green bell pepper, diced
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 cloves fresh garlic, minced
- 4 cloves peeled black garlic, diced
- 1/2 teaspoon black garlic puree
- 4 large eggs
- Salt
- Pepper

1. Cook bacon in a separate pan so that is done but not crisp. Allow to cool and dice in 1/4 inch pieces. Set aside.
2. In a sauté pan add olive oil, enough to coat the pan. Sauté Shiitake mushrooms 2-4 minutes on medium-low heat. Add green bell pepper, sauté for 1-2 minutes, then add onions and garlic, continue to sauté until the onions are nearly translucent. Add the bacon, black garlic pieces and black garlic puree. Stir until the black garlic has evenly coated the stir fry, cook for 1-2 minutes, then set this aside.
3. In a sauce pan scramble 4 eggs. Salt and pepper to taste, cook until well done.
4. Mix the eggs and stir fry together and serve with toast and a side of greek yogurt with fresh fruit.



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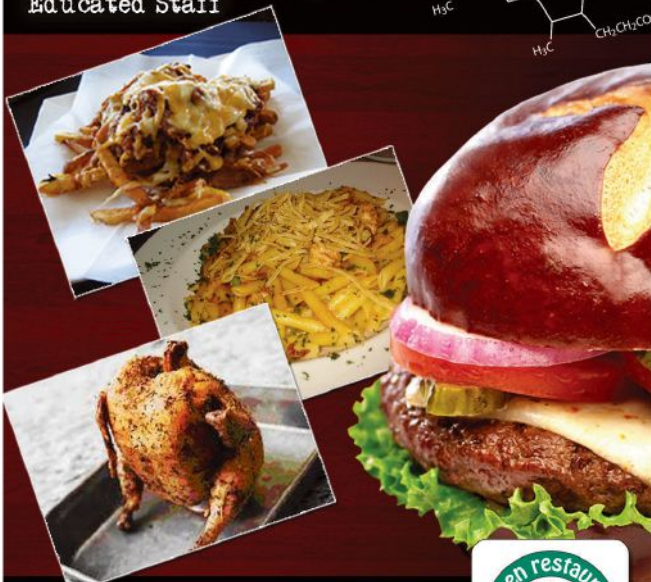
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