

# “You bought what?”

By Chef Dan Leff

Next time you're at one of the local farmer's markets, look carefully. Past the heirloom tomatoes, Brentwood Diamond corn, and baby arugula, you'll find them ... a variety of Asian vegetables that most casual shoppers lack the inclination to deal with.

Simply put, too many questions arise when seeing these veggies: “How does it taste? Do I need special equipment to cook this? Do I need a really specific recipe? Not to worry, help is on the way for preparing 4 of the most commonly found Asian vegetables.

## About Chef Dan Leff...

After graduating from the CA Culinary Academy in 1995, I've worked in venues around the Bay Area. Having worked with Bradley Ogden at the Lark Creek Inn, I specialize in Classic American cuisine, using seasonal ingredients, with a fine dining emphasis. Chef Dan Leff Catering focuses on intimate, elegant sit-down dinners and small corporate events. <http://www.chefdanleff.com>



## Chinese Water Spinach

This variety of spinach is identifiable by its hollow stems. These stems are a part of Water Spinach's appeal, as they lend a slight crunch to the vegetable when cooked.

When handling this type of spinach, remember:

- Don't cut away too much of the stem – this is the part that makes it distinctive. Wash thoroughly, then trim the stalks into fairly large pieces
- This type of spinach requires a slightly longer cooking time than conventional spinach (which tends to wilt instantly). Chinese Water Spinach does well when sautéed in garlic and/or ginger, then allowed to braise in its own liquids for 2-3 minutes. Cooked in this manner, it's a good accompaniment wherever a vegetable side dish is called for.



## Bitter Melon

This item looks like a wrinkled cucumber with a light green skin. It's called “bitter” for a very good reason and requires specific handling:

- Before using, wash lightly and trim off the ends. Slice lengthwise, and remove the seeds and accompanying pith with a tablespoon.
- Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Add the melon halves and poach for 3-4 minutes. Drain, rinse with cold water, and allow cooling down. The pieces should still be firm; they will be cooked again later so don't overcook!
- At this point, the melon pieces can be cut into strips or cubes. They are best when prepared in dishes with enough richness to balance out their undeniable bitterness. When added to a hearty, spicy lamb stew, they add a touch of bitter flavor. They do well in wonton soup; the richness of the broth and the wontons offset their bitterness.



## Chinese Broccoli (“Gai Lan”)

Like Water Spinach, this variety is tougher than its Western counterpart. Only a few pointers are required:

- Wash lightly, then trim off just a half inch of the stalky ends. Cut into large pieces.
- Bring salted water to a boil, add the pieces, and poach for 4-5 minutes. Drain and allow to cool.
- The Chinese Broccoli can now be used in a number of different ways:
  - It can be poached again, briefly, to warm it through – at this point it can be served with richer foods, it's crunchy texture providing some distinction
  - It can be sautéed briefly in ginger, garlic, and oyster sauce – this makes for a good, interesting vegetable side dish
  - If cut into thinner pieces, it can be added to a chicken broth-style soup for added texture and nutrients



## Chinese Long Beans

In their long rope-like bundles, with leathery green or purple skin, there's something otherworldly about these beans. Preparing them is actually quite easy, however:

- Wash them lightly and trim off just the ends. Cut them into more easily edible pieces, perhaps 2"-3" in length
- These beans are versatile – they can be deep-fried (until the skin just starts to wrinkle) and drained, poached in boiling salted water (for 3-4 minutes) and cooled, or steamed.
- They can be used for stir-fries, in soups, or even in salads (surprisingly, they do well in potato salads, especially if enough mustard and vinegar are used in the dressing).



*Summer Special Shrimp Cocktail*



**\$3.95\*** Must present coupon!

\*through September in Petar's lounge or patio only.  
Not good with any other coupons, discounts or promotional offers.

**Petar's Restaurant**  
is located in the heart of Lafayette at  
**32 Lafayette Circle.**

Petar's is open for lunch Monday through Saturday from 11:30 to 4:00 and open for dinner nightly.



**925-284-7117**



**THE PATIO**  
Tapas & Restaurant

SOUTH AMERICAN FOOD



(925)  
299  
6885

Open Daily  
5pm-10pm

Full Bar

960 MORAÑA ROAD, LAFAYETTE  
www.thepatiotapas.com