

# Fresh flavor from urban farmer Kevin Feinstein



Photos Susie Iventosch

## By Susie Iventosch

Urban farming is a method of localizing the food chain in a way that even surpasses the farmers' market phenomenon. In urban agriculture, food is cultivated and distributed at a specifically local level. According to local urban farmer Kevin Feinstein, (aka Feral Kevin), farmers' markets often bring growers from well outside the immediate area, whereas urban farms can literally be located right inside the city limits of the local town. Generally, these are fairly small plots of land, often located in the earthy spaces between industrial buildings and parking lots, but even more likely in someone's front or back yard. Feinstein began preparing his first urban farm (Feijoa Farms) in the Shadelands Business Park in Walnut Creek about a year ago. Feijoa Farms, approximately 2,000 square feet in size, is situated in an abandoned community garden. When Feinstein arrived, the irrigation system was buried under a thick tangle of weeds, so in addition to a lot of weed whacking, goats were brought in to clear the land.

He planted his first crops last spring and has been harvesting and selling his produce to local restaurants and individuals in the months since. He has sold his produce to both Reve and Postino restaurants in Lafayette and is

now working on his farmers' market certification so he can sell directly to more local customers. Until then, the public can go to the farm and buy from his produce stand, which he opens in the parking lot of Calicraft Brewing Company, just adjacent to the farm. (Be sure to check in with Feinstein prior to your trip, to make sure he'll be there.) Feijoa Farms specializes in exotic basil, arugula, cilantro, wrinkled cress, salad turnips, edible flowers (pansies, violets, calendula and bachelor buttons) and specialty herbs such as French sorrel, among others. But Feinstein's favorite crop, and the one he goes nuts for, is papalo, an ancient Mexican herb that he describes as having an intoxicating flavor.

"Papalo is used where cilantro might be used, but the flavors are not the same," Feinstein reports. "I use it in burgers and Mexican food and I like to use it on pizza. I make pizza with a combination of cornmeal crust, pizza sauce and salsa, tomatoes, cheese and papalo."

Some say that the flavor of papalo is somewhere between arugula, cilantro and rue — another herb I've never tasted before. Papalo has a beautiful leaf, with perfectly scalloped edges and is much better adapted to really hot weather compared to cilantro.

Unfortunately, the local growing season for papalo is July through early October, so you may have to wait until

next summer to try this interesting plant. Feinstein is hoping to still have some on hand for our readers, but it is very close to the end of the local season. He will have many other great crops on hand, in case you miss out on his papalo.

Feinstein models his farming after world-famous urban farming pioneer Curtis Stone of British Columbia, Canada. "He had the idea of localizing the food economy in urban settings," Feinstein noted. "My goal is to revitalize an ultra-local food economy by selling directly from my farm and starting farms in other nearby locations. I eventually would like to have multiple urban farm locations."

While Feinstein plants short rotation crops right now, he would love to grow orchard trees as well as venture into "land race" farming. Land race farming is the process of growing enough of a crop and in such variety as to be able to select the best possible breed for a particular soil and climate. Feinstein credits Joseph Lofthouse of Logan, Utah as a visionary in this field. (Please see the info box for more information on Lofthouse and Land Race farming.)

"This process allows seeds and plants to cross pollinate until they develop a variety that thrives in its environment," he describes. "This is how farming was originally

done. I would love to do this with vegetables such as kale."

Not only is Feinstein in the forefront of this type of farming, but he is an expert on foraging and the author of four books. His latest book, "The Primitive Gardener," is available on Amazon. He has also managed the garden at the Merriewood Children's Center in Lafayette for the past 14 years. This newspaper

featured him in an article on March 26, 2014, where we elaborated on his foraging classes, guided tours and the huge variety of edible vegetation he finds while on the trail.

For more information on Kevin Feinstein and his upcoming classes and events, please see the gray info box below or email him at: feijoafarms@gmail.com



## Papalo Polenta Pizza

(Author's note: I was not able to get to Feijoa Farms in order to try Feinstein's papalo and had to use basil on my pizza instead. Also where Feinstein uses a cornmeal crust from Whole Foods, I used polenta as my crust. This makes the crust totally acceptable for gluten-free diets, and is was delicious. Just don't think it will behave exactly like a pizza crust, because it cannot really be a finger food, but rather served with a fork!)

### Polenta

#### INGREDIENTS

3 ½ cups water  
1 cup medium grind cornmeal  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 tablespoon olive oil (for baking the crust)

Spray a pizza stone or sturdy baking sheet with cooking spray. Set aside.

Bring the water and salt to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Slowly add cornmeal, whisking all the while, until all of it is added. Turn down heat and continue to cook until polenta begins to thicken, 10-15 minutes, stirring often. When thick, turn polenta out onto the pizza stone and form into a 10-12-inch circle using a spatula. Cool completely, loosely cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least one hour.

When ready to serve, preheat oven to 450 degrees. Remove baking sheet from refrigerator and brush with olive oil. Bake for about 15 minutes, or until the crust begins to get a little bit crisp around the edges.

Remove from the oven and spread pizza sauce (recipe below) over the polenta crust, and top with toppings. Bake at 450 degrees for approximately 15 minutes, more or less, until cheese is melted, bubbly and beginning to brown a bit. Serve piping hot with forks!

### Pizza Sauce

Mix together:

1 cup canned crushed tomatoes  
1 cup of your favorite salsa  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
Toppings  
10-12 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced  
2-3 cups fresh papalo, minced (use 1/2 cup of cilantro or basil if you cannot find papalo)  
1 red onion, thinly sliced and caramelized  
3 medium tomatoes, thinly sliced

Optional suggested toppings: sliced olives, roasted red bell peppers, mushrooms, grated Parmesan, red pepper flakes, pickled jalapeno peppers ...



### Feijoa Farms

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### For more information about Land Race Farming

Joseph Lofthouse  
<http://garden.lofthouse.com/seed-list.phtml>

Susie can be reached at [suziventosch@gmail.com](mailto:suziventosch@gmail.com).

This recipe can be found on our website: [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com). If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.

# How to get the most from veterinary visits

## By Mona S. Miller, DVM

I have written a few articles this year about how to make veterinary visits better for our furry friends, and I'd like to dedicate an article to the human owners, or caregivers — how can you make your veterinary visit work for you?

My number one piece of advice is "Be Prepared"! Plan ahead for what your goals are for the veterinary visit — perhaps it's an annual wellness exam and you have no concerns, or perhaps you want a new lump checked out, or perhaps your dog is shaking his head and you think he might have an ear infection, or perhaps your cat is really sick. Whatever the reason, it is valuable for the veterinarian to have some background information, and to have the ability to make direct recommendations for diagnostic tests and treatment options. Information that is useful, especially with low-grade chronic issues, include the duration of the problem (how long has the lump been present?), whether it has changed (bigger?), and whether it's

bothering the dog (is he scratching at it?).

Know your pet's medications and how much/how often you are giving these medications. Are they routine flea and tick chewable tablets? Are you giving a Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug once or twice daily? Are you giving over-the-counter supplements? Quite often, doses noted originally in a medical record or on a prescription label are changed during follow-up phone conversations. What's on the label isn't always what is happening at home. Veterinarians need to know the specifics, in order to not prescribe something else that might be contraindicated.

Arrive on time or a little early! Most general practice vets keep an appointment schedule, with office calls/exams limited to 15-30 minutes. If you are 5 minutes late to a 15-minute appointment, this will greatly impact the ability for both you and the vet to achieve all the desired goals during the remaining 10 minutes. If you are bringing a new patient to your vet, bring previous medical records with you, or better yet, send them

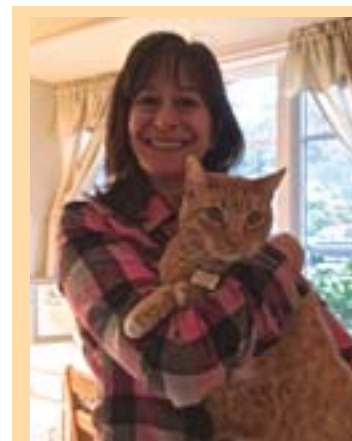
ahead of time. If you get some vaccines elsewhere, bring those records with you too.

If there are a few items on your list of concerns to address, think ahead about what your priority items are (i.e., is the lump more concerning to you than your dog's vaccine for that appointment?). Time or health constraints might cause a shift in the priorities, but it's good for me to have a sense what is most important on that day for my client. Additionally, what is on my list to discuss might also shift the priorities. For instance, a dog due for optional vaccines might not be feeling well on the appointment day, so we might end up discussing the recent vomit/diarrhea rather than administering a vaccine to a sick dog. Or perhaps we discuss flea and tick control options in detail, so that might override checking the non-growing lump that has been present for a few years. Everyone's goal (mine included) is to cover all items on a list, but sometimes we are just not able to do that.

It is most desirable for the primary adult/pet owner to be present for a veterinary exam.

Since our pet patients are not able to tell us with words, a large part of the diagnostic process comes from owner verbalization, or what is called the "history" part of the exam. We might start diagnostics in a different direction with a 5-year-old vomiting Labrador who is known to eat socks, than with the same dog who has exposure to mushrooms growing in the yard. However, sometimes it isn't always possible for a pet owner to be physically present in the exam. A reasonable alternative is for the owner to be available by phone for the duration of the exam/consultation. If you are unable to be present (either physically or by phone, in real-time), then consider sending an individual who is authorized by you to make medical and financial decisions. I see a lot of patients who are presented by an owner's "agent" (relative, employee, nanny, pet sitter) — who have varying degrees of information and authorization. The most frustrating situation (for both owner and vet) occurs when the presenting individual has no information about the problem,

and no authority to make financial decisions — and the owner is not reachable by phone. The most successful vet visit occurs when the person bringing in the pet has the ability to make medical and financial decisions for the welfare of the pet.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her son, two cats and yellow Labrador. She attended UC Berkeley as an undergraduate, and received her DVM from UC Davis. She has been happy to call Lafayette home since 2001. She can be reached via email at [MonaSDVM@aol.com](mailto:MonaSDVM@aol.com). She welcomes questions from readers that may get incorporated into a column.

For other tips about making a veterinary visit successful, visit the American Veterinary Medical Association link: <https://www.avma.org/public/YourVet/Pages/visits.aspx>