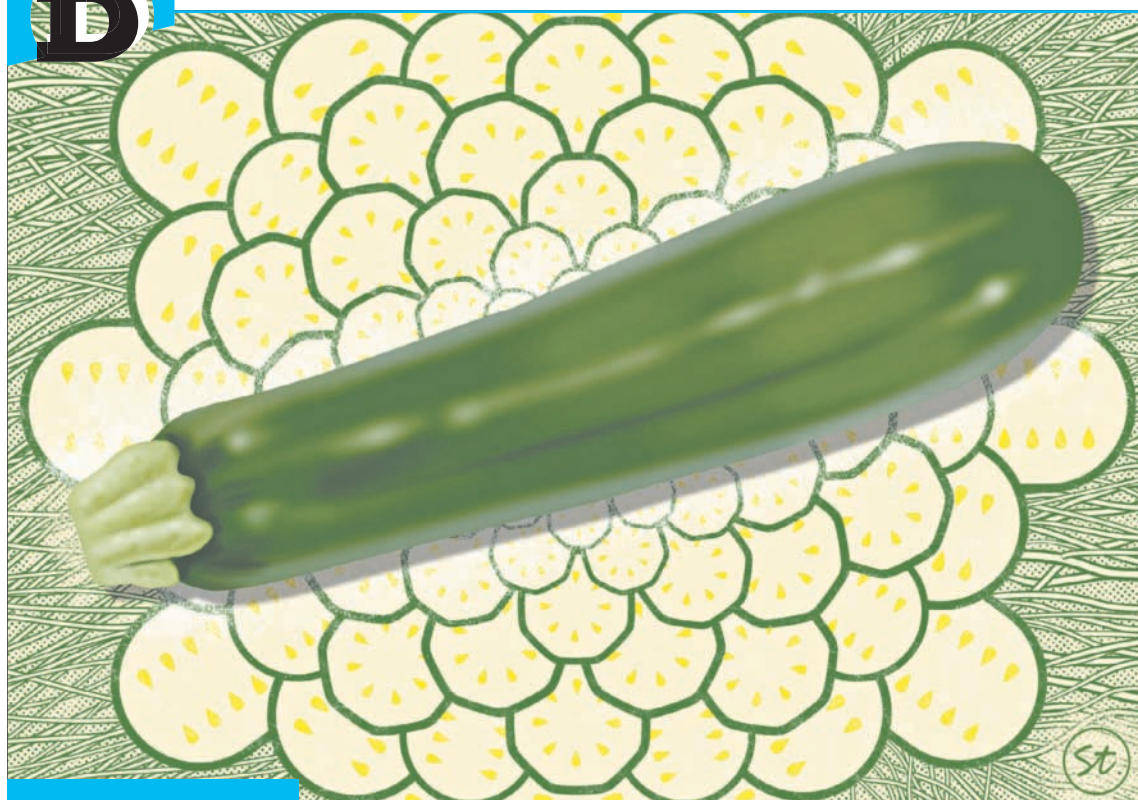


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ILLUSTRATION BY MARK STIVERS



OFF MENU

# The zucchinis are coming!

BY MITCH BARBER

**This summer is somewhat different** for zucchinis in the Sacramento area.

Courtney Smith is a farmer with the Loving Nature Farm in nearby Clarksburg, and a vendor at the bustling Sunday farmers market at 8th and W streets. She told SN&R that fans of the versatile vegetable should expect harvest season to be a little later than usual.

"Zucchinis will be late to come up this year because of the way the rains happened," Smith said, referring to Sacramento's record-setting rainfall in May. "They'll be harvested when we get more sun-mid-to-late June."

Why be concerned with these green garden gourds we call zucchini? The USDA says that a medium-sized zucchini has just 33 calories and is a good source of calcium, niacin, riboflavin, thiamin and vitamin C. They're also remarkably filling.

If you're looking to make them even more filling, you could head to Willie's Burgers on Broadway for its fried zucchini (\$5.30). When your receipt number is shouted from

the pickup counter ("171!") you'll find a heap of steaming, golden-brown battered zucchini slices with a generous helping of shredded Parmesan cheese, little chunks of garlic and garlic salt. A sampling yields an instant flavor explosion: The breading makes them taste like vegetarian State Fair corn dogs, though the batter is made with wheat flour. It comes out crunchy-chewy, and the zucchinis inside are moist like ripe peaches.

Over on Folsom Boulevard, Brandon Barlow, head of production at V Miller Meats, recommends zucchini skewers paired with sirloin steak grilled on the barbecue. Barlow cuts the zucchini lengthwise and lathers them with a paste ground down with a mortar and pestle.

"Mint goes really well with the zucchini, and fresh herbs," he said. "You make it into a paste with olive oil and garlic."

For the sirloin chunks, he recommends a spice rub.

If you'd rather leave the preparation to a chef, you could go to Mother on K Street, where co-owner

Ryan Donahue believes zucchini is "a good player in any dish."

Mother's Garden Ratatouille (\$16) includes green zucchini, red onion, grilled tomato (for a bit of umami), red wine and a side of garlic bread.

And then there's zucchini bread. Just across the street from Mother at Ambrosia Café, you can get a giant slice of cinnamon zucchini bread, a wholesome Sunday brunch option that smells spicy like pumpkin pie. It's topped with an aromatic cinnamon frosting that assaults the palate fiercely, but the zucchini flecks in the bread have a way of equalizing its otherwise overpowering flavor. A slice is just \$2.50, and you can watch cars, pedestrians, bicycles and light rail trains jockey for position outside the tall street-side windows.

Something else interesting to try is the orange zucchini flower, or blossom. They can be battered and fried just like the zucchini slices at Willie's and the bloom attached to the fruit looks something like an exploding party popper. □

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