



Thai-style corn on the cob, \$7.50, Chef/Owner Clark Frasier, Arrows, Ogunquit, Me. RECIPE, p. 103.

Curated FIRES

THE RIGHT WOOD GIVES VEGETABLES A GENTLE NUDGE OF FLAVOR

by Nevin Martell

Burgers, steaks, and seafood aren't the only foods that benefit from a kiss of wood-fired flavor. Chefs add vegetables to the fire to create show-stopping sides, albeit with a little caution; the choice of wood can make or break a dish. Steer clear of woods that smoke too much, because that can overwhelm vegetables, advises Tim Love, Chef/Owner of Woodshed Smokehouse in Fort Worth, Texas. "You turn them into ashtrays."

Love's restaurant focuses on wood-fired dishes cooked by a quartet of smokers in

a custom-built 650-square-foot smoke shack, for which he uses four kinds of locally sourced wood: oak, mesquite, hickory, and pecan. For his roasted acorn squash, he uses oak. "It burns hotter," he says. "That means less smoke, which imparts a more even, mellower flavor." Love finishes the dish with smoked pepper hollandaise made with *guajillo* chiles

to add a kick and reinforce the smoky elements.

At Graffiato in Washington, D.C., Chef/Owner Mike Isabella prefers using a mix of cherry wood and hickory from Virginia to

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fuel his wood stone oven. "The hickory burns hotter and longer," he says. "The cherry wood burns fast, but it really sweetens up the smoke and lightens up the flavors." To create a uniform cooking environment, he stacks alternating varieties of wood at different angles. The crisscrossing ensures that there's always air between the layers, allowing the smoke to circulate smoothly.

For his roasted cauliflower, Isabella starts by tossing the florets in brown butter, then he par-roasts them in the back of the oven and close to the fire to get a slight char on them. When the order is called, he warms them up in the front of the oven by the door, then throws on red onion, pecorino, finely chopped mint, and fresh lemon (\$7, recipe, plateonline.com).

Chef/Owner Clark Frasier of Arrows in Ogunquit, Me., fuels his fires with a mixture of oak and applewood harvested from the restaurant's five-acre property. "Apple has a nice sweet essence; it never overwhelms," he says. His Thai-style grilled corn on the cob with coconut milk (\$7.50, recipe, p. 103) only spends two to four minutes on the outdoor wood-fired grill. To ensure an even browning on the ears of corn, Frasier skewers them so they can be easily rotated.

Wood firing can help create textural interplay within a dish. Cured white oak is vital in the Brussels sprouts with guanciale (\$5, recipe, plateonline.com) at Atlanta's Ecco. Executive Chef Craig Richards begins by rendering down the meat in olive oil, then he cooks the halved sprouts low and slow in the mixture until they caramelize. Only then does he put them in the oven. "The wood fire adds a char and crisp to the edges," he says. "So there's a contrast of textures between that and the softer, sweeter interior."

Nevin Martell roasts marshmallows over birch wood so they taste faintly of root beer. For recipes from this article and more, visit plateonline.com.