

## I LOVE THE FARMERS MARKET--AND MY ADDICTION TO MAKING DILL PICKLES

Every Saturday Morning I get up and head to the farmers market at 3000 Eastside. I like to get there when it opens at 8 because there is always a run on certain vendors. Here is my plan for navigating the market. There are two aisles and I chose the one closest to Richmond first. I head all the way to the end where the tomato/cucumber people are located. They are Steve and Tiffany King, aka Veggie Kings Farm <<http://veggiekings.com>> of Millican, Texas. They specialize in heirloom tomatoes and seasonal veggies. Many times there is a long line because I am not the only one that thinks their tomatoes are the best. But this isn't why I go there. I go for their alpha cucumbers.

The alpha cucumber is crunchy and has a thin rind that you don't have to peel. I buy four baskets worth which is about 4 pounds. Why on earth am I buying that many? Well it all started when Tom and I saw an interview of Chef Danny Bowien. He was discussing his cookbook, *The Mission Chinese Food Cookbook*. Tom got me the cookbook as a surprise gift. It makes for an interesting read because Chef Bowen discusses his successes and failures. At first I thought it was a weird gift because the cookbook has all sorts of recipes that I would never think of eating much less cooking, like Shaved Pork Belly and Octopus Terrine with Married-Couple's Vinaigrette, not to mention Fried Pigs' Tails with Smoked Cola BBQ Sauce to name just two. However, I discovered a recipe in that cookbook for Dill Pickles that I make every weekend. And that is why I need those Alpha Cukes. They make the best pickles.



Home grown tomatoes



The Veggie Kings

I have modified Danny Bowien's DILL PICKLE recipe. He uses onions and garlic but I don't feel like cutting up onions or worrying about garlic. I slice up 4 pounds of cucumbers very chunky. Then I put them in a big bowl and add 2 tablespoons of salt, 2 tablespoons of peppercorns, 2 tablespoons of fennel seeds (the seeds, not the ground up fennel) and 2 tablespoons of cayenne pepper. (If you don't like hot, go easy on the cayenne-actually the recipe calls for red pepper flakes which should be not as hot as the cayenne. I just happened to have cayenne so that is what I use). Then I finely chop some fresh dill that I also buy from Veggie Kings. Two springs is enough, Veggie Kings sells a big bunch of dill for \$3 dollars.

I know this is weird but I dump the cucumbers and the spices in a small trash bag and shake it all up. Otherwise you have to mix it up with your hands and that just doesn't work for me. After I mix it up in the bag, I put it back in the bowl and cover it tightly with plastic wrap and put it in the fridge overnight. The next day I drain the liquid (the salt makes the cucumbers weep), and then douse it with 2 cups of white vinegar. I put the plastic wrap back on the bowl, covering it tightly and stick it back in the fridge. After 2-3 hours, I drain it again and it is ready to go. If you don't get around to draining the vinegar until the next morning, that is ok too. The pickles last about 10 days in the fridge. Yum! This makes a big batch so you can always cut the recipe in half.



Cucumbers cut up

I forgot to mention at Veggie Kings I also grab their lettuce mix and carrots if they have them. Their lettuce mix is so fresh it makes regular lettuce taste like plastic. I use it in smoothies. I figure that ground up lettuce is giving me something in the way of vitamins that combats the sugar and other crap I eat.

### **THE FLOWER LADY**

Next I head to the flower lady, Billabong Fresh Flower Farm in Hempstead, Texas, [www.Texascutflowers.com](http://www.Texascutflowers.com). She is so motherly with her flowers. She carefully wraps the stems in wet paper towels, places them in a plastic baggie and rubber bands it tightly around the stems. She wants the flowers to stay wet while they are heading to your home. She then gives the customer some flower fertilizer and explains what to do to make the flowers last longer. It can be a lengthy-slow-process.

One time I was in a rush (Ok I was caffeinated up) and I couldn't wait while she carefully, (i.e. slowly), worked on the lady's flowers in front of me). I decided I couldn't wait, so I waived the flowers in my hand explaining that I was taking them and here was the money. I had the exact change. She became distressed, really agitated, and I knew why. I was taking some of her babies without their proper wet baggie diaper wrap. She wanted to stop what she was doing to attend to the flowers I had in my hand. The lady in front of me was giving me the evil eye and I

don't blame her. I assured the flower lady that I was going straight home and her babies/flowers would be ok. I ran off with the flowers with her staring after me. The next week I went back and apologized for it and I told her my baby theory about her flowers. She said they were her babies. So I doubt you can get those kind of flowers at your florist.



The flower lady



Her Star of Bethlehem Flowers

## THE SEAFOOD STAND

My next stop at the farmers market is the booth for Airline Seafood, owned by Jose J. Rodiles. His booth is located on the other aisle. Jose has all types of fresh fish but I just get the boiled shrimp because I know I won't cook anything. (Hey, I am too busy making pickles.) Jose's shrimp is so fresh and he told me the secret to keeping it fresh. You keep it on ice in the fridge. Every day you change the ice, assuming it last more than a day which is doubtful because it is so good. Jose is also a professional oyster shucker. He said he is the current champion in Houston for shucking oysters. He shucked 900 oysters in four hours.



Jose J. Rodiles, oyster shucker

## **BONSAI BOOTH**

Next to the Airline Seafood booth is the bonsai booth from Cabrera Farm. The owner, Phillip Drilling, is the nicest man you will ever know. I always wanted a bonsai but knew they were a lot of work because of their shallow roots and the pruning involved. Phillip is so helpful. I have five bonsai that I have bought from him. They are my babies. The flower lady has her flowers babies and I have my bonsai babies. I take them back to Phillip periodically to give them a checkup.



Phillip's Bonsai Booth

## **SINFUL BAKERY**

On the other side of the Airline Seafood booth is the Sinful Bakery booth. They make vegan baked goods. I don't care if my baked goods are vegan but what they make is special because it is so good. Sinful Bakery makes homemade peanut butter and jelly pop tarts!! Deadly, but so yummy. They also make homemade granola which you cannot stop eating, cinnamon rolls and kolaches. I like to buy something and then give to someone else. I have to act quickly before I eat it myself.

After this purchase, I head across the aisle to the coffee spot, Grizzaffi Coffee. They run slow too so if there is a line, I skip the latte and just get a regular coffee for two bucks. Very good!



Grizzaffi Coffee

Then on the way out, I go back to the first aisle and purchase the best chicken salad in the world, made by Janice Schindler, former food editor for the Houston Post. Her pimento cheese is excellent too. Her website is [www.wordsandfood.com](http://www.wordsandfood.com).

Next to Ms. Schindler is Pat Greer's booth selling raw foods. I always get something from her too, usually her homemade Kombucha Tea.



Homemade Kombucha Tea

I could go on and on with this and I haven't even mentioned the mushroom booth. Go check it out!!!! But don't buy my cucumbers. I need all of those for myself.