

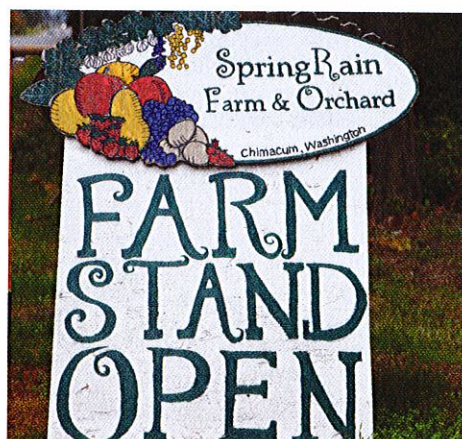
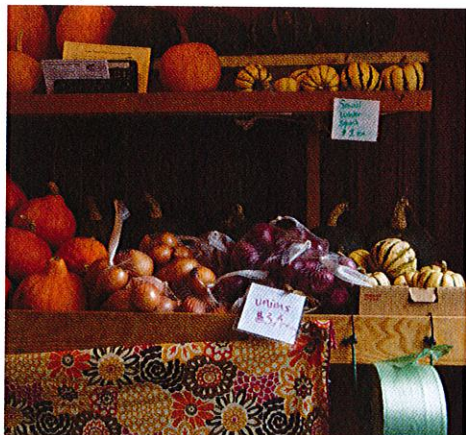
road trip

Port Ludlow Resort redefine's the Farm Dinner

a farm-to-table journey

STORY BY MEGAN HILL

PHOTOS BY CHARITY BURGGRAAF



Last year, when summer was starting to yield to fall, I couldn't help but reach for the last of the season's heirloom tomatoes, all plump and pleated and the color of a fading sunset.

The red shed constituting the farm stand at SpringRain Farm & Orchard in Chimacum was loaded with the bounty of early fall: enormous pumpkins and all manner of squash. A small selection of tomatoes, jams, herbs, greens, and pasture-raised eggs lined the shelves. Visitors could select and weigh their purchases, leaving payment behind in an on-your-honor system.

I add the tomatoes — and a speckled-green kabocha squash — to a picnic basket, which I'll take back to Chef Dan Ratigan at Port Ludlow Resort's Fireside Inn, after I pick out other ingredients from Finnriver Farm and Cidery and Red Dog Farm, both nearby in Chimacum. Then I'll sit down to a multi-course meal crafted of the fruit, vegetables, cheese, and herbs I've selected.

The experience is made possible through the resort's Farm Dinner package, an offer available from June to October that combines a one-night stay with a multi-course dinner almost entirely of your creation. At check-in, participants are given a wicker basket and "farm bucks" to spend at three spots nearby: Red Dog, SpringRain, and Finnriver.

Each farm has a stand from which you can purchase an array of items, though the inn provides the meal's proteins. With that accounted for, the farm bucks allow me to load the basket with heirloom tomatoes, goat cheese, kabocha squash, watermelon radishes, celery root, Finnriver's black currant cider, potatoes, Brussels sprouts, and Asian pears. I pick a few items I've never tried, a few to challenge the chef, and a few I've had before and have looked forward to eating again.

After shopping, I deliver the basket to the front desk, allowing Ratigan and his team the requested two-hour window before my dinner reservation at the inn's Fireside Restaurant. It's the perfect amount of time to explore the property, taking in the mountain

views by kayaking the bay or walking some of the beach and forest trails that start near the New England-inspired inn and guesthouses. After exploring the beach, I opt for reading next to the fireplace in my room while watching the rain thrum at the decks of the sailboats in the marina.

Meanwhile, Ratigan is busy at work downstairs. He's been the chef at Fireside for eight years, although before he got this job, he had never heard of Port Ludlow.

"Any time that I had available I would just drive around the area and look and see what's here, what's there," he tells me later, over the phone. "I just kept seeing farm after farm after farm." That inspired him to take the menu in a different direction, scrapping the relationship with a corporate distributor and choosing instead to source from local farms.

It took him a few seasons to get the kinks worked out, but now the restaurant is sourcing almost entirely locally, from cheese and produce to proteins like duck, chicken, and turkeys. On the seafood side, Ratigan has hit the jackpot: His fishmonger, who also forages wild mushrooms and berries for the restaurant, gets fresh catches from Neah Bay. "He gets black cod, steelhead, salmon, halibut, right off the boat," he says. "I've never had fish that fresh unless I'm pulling it out of the water myself. There's no middleman, just one guy delivering it to me."

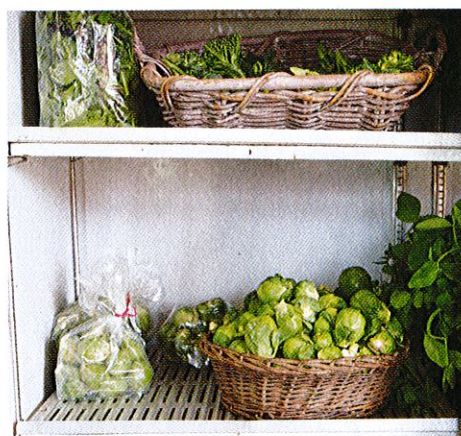
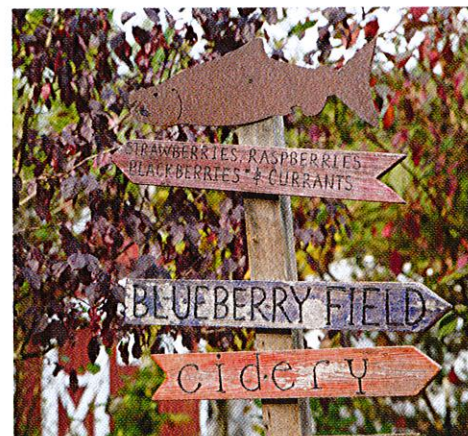
The farm package was launched in summer 2012, dreamed up by Ratigan and the resort's general manager, Debbie Wardrop.

"We were really trying hard to help our guests understand why getting things straight from the farm and the fisheries and the artisans mattered, and what that process is like," Wardrop says.

It's been a popular offering, Ratigan says.

"The guests get to have a blast cruising around to the farms and then they think, 'I wonder what dinner is going to be?'"

Guests can also use the experience to expand their horizons a bit, Ratigan says. "This is the time to get that goat cheese and find out





what all the fuss is about," he suggests. "Just know that all of the products that come from the farm are way better than you think they are. If you don't like a certain ingredient, this is the time to give it another try. Almost every time, they're like, 'Well, yeah, that's pretty good. I didn't expect that.'"

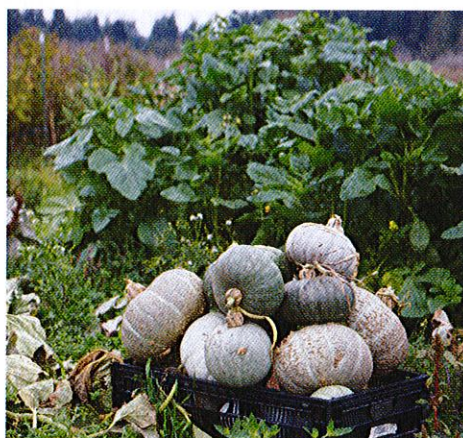
The draw is getting to direct your meal to some extent, but there remains the element of surprise — and the skill — of a professional chef behind the meal. And it's all driven by a farm-to-table approach.

"Guests want to feel that sense of place," Wardrop says. "They're thinking, 'Let's understand the place we're vacationing.'"

It's fun for the kitchen, too. "We take the basket in the back, and we pull all the ingredients out," says Ratigan. "We all kind of stare at it for a minute and then it starts to come together. Part of the reason it works out without failure is that the ingredients they're bringing us are so good. It's really hard for us to screw them up. Sometimes the inspiration keeps going and before you know it, we have ideas for 32 courses."

Though there is a great deal to be said for the high quality of fresh ingredients from local farms, Ratigan is being modest. Two hours later, I indulge in an elegant, multi-course meal that not only shows off what I sourced from the farms, but also Ratigan's deft hand.

From my basket, he crafted a spiraled tower of goat cheese and heirloom tomato; a silky kabocha squash soup; Neah Bay salmon with roasted watermelon radishes over a celery root puree, all drizzled with black currant cider reduction; a steak with chanterelles, potatoes, and Brussels sprouts; a salad of micro-greens; and an Asian pear tart. I ate every bit of the summer's last hurrah and the fall's early offerings, freshly plucked from the earth and expertly prepared. *eS*



Megan Hill is a freelance writer specializing in food, travel, and the outdoors. She also acts as *Edible Seattle's* social media manager.