



The
**HAMPTONS
& LONG ISLAND**
Homegrown
Cookbook



Local Food, Local Restaurants, Local Recipes

Leeann Lavin

Photography by Lindsay Morris & Jennifer Calais Smith







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Foreword

A decade or so ago, when my wife and I decided to move to the East End, it was partly the landscape that drew us. Here, a mere one hundred miles east of New York City, were rich, expansive farm fields being worked by farmers and their machines, dotted with potato barns and wineries and clusters of salad-growing greenhouses.

The major roads—Highway 27 on the South Fork and Route 25 on the North Fork—are laid out like arteries of gastronomic exploration, with farmstands and tasting rooms every hundred yards or so in the denser stretches. Miraculously, the whole region is closely bordered by a salty shoreline, our entire climate insulated by the heat-holding bays and oceans.

It's a landscape that dazzled us partly by what it yields. All manner of vegetables—potatoes and cauliflower are still big crops—erupt from ocean-tempered fields that enjoy one of the longest growing seasons in the region. East End fields regularly hold tomatoes, eggplants, and other summer hangers-on—even on Thanksgiving. Along the shore are clams and oysters and schools of fish that come close enough for casters or seiners. In deeper waters, Long Island fishers scoop up squid and flounder, porgies and herring.

I was glad to become a new part of the long history of farmers, fishers, poets, and happy eaters moved by freshly dug steamers, ears of sweet corn still warm from the field, Long Island duck, and the East End's blissful and complete culinary experience.

But what might have felt like a revolution ten years ago now feels like a full-blown renaissance. There is an established wine country with product sipped locally, in New York City and beyond, and

deep-rooted vines have become an essential piece of the farmland preservation puzzle. The chefs who helped build Long Island cuisine are tweaking that puzzle, perhaps egged on by the eruption of home-grown Latino cooking.

Food entrepreneurs are everywhere—from cupcake makers to farm-to-table canners. Farmers' markets have sprouted up in virtually every town on the South Fork, while school districts from Riverhead to East Hampton are erecting greenhouses, upgrading their food, and leading farmer-focused field trips. Nano-breweries and distilleries are flourishing, and neighbors are rediscovering kitchen gardens and backyard poultry. While the East End has historically been the breadbasket of New York City, it's now reclaiming its role as the breadbasket for itself.

If it was the abundant harvest that first drew me to this area, then it was the constellation of farmers, fishers, winemakers, chefs, bakers, cheesemakers, beekeepers, and other people behind that harvest that caused me to stay. Yes, food fresh from the field is wondrous. But it's even more satisfying when you know the people and story behind it. Celebrating that story is the mission of *Edible East End*. It's a mission all of us share with this book. No matter what your role in the food chain is, I hope you consider these pages a call to action to know, savor, and support the people who feed all of us.

Brian Halweil
Editor, *Edible East End*
Sag Harbor, New York
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Introduction



It's no coincidence—though perhaps it can be considered a culinary manifest destiny—that the East End of Long Island has long been affectionately known as the Twin Forks. Today, the North and South Forks' twin tines can readily dish up the island's unparalleled farm-to-plate food experience.

Long Island is, in fact, the longest and largest island in the contiguous United States, extending nearly 120 miles from New York Harbor to Montauk Point, brimming with backwoods, farms, bays, and beaches. F. Scott Fitzgerald, while living on Long Island's Gold Coast, captured its character in the *Great Gatsby* as "that slender riotous island."

Home to America's first successful suburban expansion following World War II, it has also long been renowned for its affluence, ranked among the wealthiest counties in the country. Gilded Age mansions line the North Shore, *Architectural Digest* cover shots pay homage to Hollywood East on the South Fork in the Hamptons, and Wall Street financiers have long canoodled here with great artists and other famous residents, such as Jackson Pollack, Walt Whitman, Steven Spielberg, Martha Stewart, Donna Karan, Billy Joel, and Alec Baldwin. Weekenders from Manhattan ("the City") seek solace and rejuvenation at their Long Island country houses, and the undeniable source of that inspiration has always been Long Island's unique natural beauty and bounty.

Long before the island became the wealthy vacation mecca it is now, the native Shinnecock Indian tribe hunted, fished, and farmed on Long Island and taught the first European settlers how to do so—growing beans, foraging for wild plants, and using fish for fertilizer.

Farming became the island's first industry. Today, potato pastures may have given way to orchards and vineyards, and dairy and goat farms may have replaced the heritage duck's grass fields, but Long Island is still recognized as the most productive farming area in New York State.

The Island's tableau and its cultural heritage of homegrown agriculture have inspired a cadre of ingredients-minded master chefs who possess a reverence for their local food source. They have studied and cooked in renowned four-star restaurants across the island, from the Gold Coast to Hampton Bays, and all over the world. Regardless of whether the chefs relocated to discover the charms of the island or left briefly to pursue the siren song of culinary education elsewhere, or couldn't ever bear to leave, all feel the yearning for their *terroir*: Long Island.

The Hamptons and Long Island Homegrown Cookbook pays tribute to the remarkable, authentic farms, gardens, vineyards, and waterways that are Long Island. It also honors those chefs who are bringing Long Island's unique homegrown harvest to food-obsessed plates and palates and, in the process, helping the island's growers and food artisans preserve a precious way of life. Through their ardent beliefs, tenacity, and commitment to their craft and distinctive local cuisine, the chefs featured here have demonstrated a fidelity to the amazingly good, farm-forward Long Island cuisine.

The Hamptons and South Fork

Split at Riverhead from the North Fork, the South Fork peninsula is surrounded by water and encompasses the area commonly referred to as “The Hamptons,” a lifestyle featured in the country’s most haute society pages. Ask homeowners or visitors in the area what they like about it, and they’ll rhapsodize about the beaches, surfing, fishing, wildlife, art, shopping, celebrity spotting, nightlife, and food.



Nick and Toni's

Chef Joseph Realmuto

Nick and Toni's Garden with Peconic Land Trust





There is perhaps no better example of the nexus of kitchen, garden, and fine art than Nick & Toni's restaurant in East Hampton, Long Island. Launched more than twenty years ago as the love child of husband-and-wife team Jeff Salaway and Toni Ross, Nick & Toni's has been a phenomenal success from the start. The two Manhattan restaurateurs were also acclaimed fine artists and avowed environmentalists with an unfailing commitment to local foods and the culinary arts. The dining rooms and terraces at Nick & Toni's are graced with fine art, and the menu illustrates their commitment to keeping local food on the plates.

Four years after they launched the restaurant, the owners invited gardening instructor Scott Chaskey from Quail Hill Farm, a stewardship project of the Peconic Land Trust, and his team of farmers and horticulturalists to lend their expertise to the restaurant's on-site kitchen garden. It took four more years to carve out the garden, Chaskey recalls. Today, he and his team use cover crops and religiously add four tons of compost every year.

Delineating the edge of the garden are sculptures by Salaway, who died in a car accident in 2001. His artistic works serve as the perfect transition between the garden's picturesque fruits and vegetables and the culinary art Chef Joe Realmuto creates in the kitchen. Having worked at Nick & Toni's for nearly twenty years, Joe has grown up steeped in the owners' farm-to-table credo and follows it in his menus.

Recognizing the ongoing influence he can exert on the local-food movement, Joe invests his time and talents in a number of education-based outreach efforts, including one-on-one conversations with customers, staff training, in-school gardening and cooking programs for students and their teachers, and sponsorship of community events.

Joe works closely with Chaskey and his team to plan the season's succession of plantings in the restaurant's garden. Introducing new and different varieties of foods adds interest to the growing season.

"We usually repeat a lot of things from one year to the next, but part of the joy of the garden is discovering these new things and figuring out what to do with them," Joe says.

He describes with relish the year he and his chefs were picking vegetables in the garden and spotted some knobby-looking items.

"They looked like orange zebra-striped heirloom tomatoes," Joe says. The chefs had no idea what they were. Turns out they were Turkish heirloom eggplants. "Freaky but delicious!" he says.

Chaskey echoes the chef's sentiment about finding new foods: "Farming is a lot of tractoring and hoeing. Part of our joy is discovering and growing new and exciting plant varieties."

The intensive staff training at Nick & Toni's ensures that the front line servers are well informed about the in-season, fresh foods on the menu. Daily staff meetings include sampling the day's menu additions. At the end of the session, everyone—from the busboy to the

waiters—is expected not only to recite the menu but also be able to explain where the foods originated.

Joe came to cooking by way of his cultural heritage. Part of a happy Italian family that celebrated food, Joe and his siblings worked at the Villa Russo, a local Italian catering hall in Queens, where they grew up. His first job there was running food from the kitchen to the buffet table. Later, at age sixteen, he nabbed an opportunity to work in the kitchen. He worked every night after school, prepping for the weekend events; on Saturday and Sunday he worked doubles prepping for the catering-hall parties. He hung out with the chefs, who tempered his outlook about food and his career.

After graduating from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in 1993, he worked briefly at the River Café in New York City. Called "the Harvard Business School of the culinary world" and "the restaurant that launched a thousand chefs," the River Café was an ideal place to begin a career. It is also widely acknowledged as the first restaurant to seek out regional growers and artisanal food producers and build relationships with them (as opposed to "dialing and buying" in bulk from wholesale suppliers). In this environment, Joe was introduced to a nascent and emerging approach to fresher food resources.

When Joe started at Nick & Toni's in 1993, the prospects for local farmers were bleak. But with the new millennium came the new farm-to-table and Slow Food movements, and farms started to make a comeback, albeit in a different footprint.

The products from these local sources fit right in with Joe's "simple is better; simple is more" approach to cooking. He says, "I've always appreciated the product more than the technique. The biggest thing for me is freshness. It is the undeniable essence of flavor."

As Joe and his "family of farmers" think of the future, they look for ways to keep the farm-to-table movement going. The most important task now is helping local farmers fight the temptation to sell their farmland, which is worth so much more for development than it is for agriculture. Fortunately, local homeowners and the tourist industry recognize the importance of keeping Long Island farms alive.

And if Joe Realmuto has anything to do with it, they will succeed. Together, chefs like Joe and local farms in Long Island are connecting food and people in a meaningful and enduring way.