

## **Marjoram in a Thick, Green Sauce for Golden Beets (and other vegetables)**

Serves

4 to 6

The original inspiration for this sauce came from Ada Boni's book, *Italian Regional Cooking*, which was published in the seventies. The color photographs were strange looking with off-colors, but I mined it relentlessly for ideas. A Ligurian recipe for a Genoese fish salad had a sauce that was not quite like this one, but something like it, and along with the featured fish there were a number of vegetables, which were what caught my eye in the first place. I don't really recall how I got from her recipe to this one, but I've made this sauce for years and I've taught it nearly as long and it never fails to surprise and delight.

I adore marjoram in summer sauces, like this salsa verde. Basil is good, of course, but marjoram is less expected and every bit as summery. In classes, students commonly agree and become enthusiastic converts to this herb. Even if you live where it succumbs to the first hard frost, you can buy a few plants in late spring, tuck them in a sunny spot, and use the herb all summer. When the plant finally freezes, you'll be ready to move onto rosemary, sage and winter savory.

This sauce is so thick that it's almost a paste. You can loosen it by adding more oil, or water, if you like, but as a paste, know that you can spread it on hard-cooked eggs or grilled fish. It's phenomenally good with vegetables of all kinds—grilled leeks, sliced tomatoes, roasted cauliflower, steamed fennel or these golden beets. You can also toss it with pasta and stir it into rice, put it on a hard-cooked egg, and add it into soups and summery vegetable soups and ragouts. This sauce is not difficult to make in an ample mortar with a heavy pestle, but you can

also use a food processor if you prefer. I have made this without the bread for a student with celiac disease and added more nuts for bulk.

4 golden beets about 3 to 4 ounces each

1 slice country bread, crusts trimmed

2 tablespoons aged red wine vinegar

1 garlic clove, coarsely chopped

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

1/3 cup marjoram leaves, stripped from their stems

3 tablespoons capers, drained

1/2-cup pine nuts or walnuts

1 cup finely chopped parsley

10 pitted green olives, chopped

½ cup best olive oil

To prepare the beets, cut off all but an inch of their stems and leave the tails so that the juices stay mostly within the beet. Rinse off any sand or mud then steam them until tender-firm when pierced with a knife. Rinse to cool, the slip off the skins. Refrigerate them until they're well chilled if desired, or use them at room temperature. (Beets can be steamed days before you need them.)

To make the sauce, put the bread on a plate and sprinkled the vinegar over it.

Pound the garlic with 1/2 teaspoon salt in a mortar until smooth, then work in marjoram, capers, pine nuts, parsley and olives. Work with the pestle until you have a coarse mash.

(Alternatively, you can do this in a food processor.) Add the bread and the olive oil and work

until the sauce is well amalgamated. Season with pepper, taste for vinegar and add a little more if you think it needs it. The sauce should be very thick and very green.

Slice the beets into rounds about 3/8-inch thick, arrange on a plate and add a spoonful of the sauce to each. Or, perch smaller diced beets on an endive leaf, top with the sauce, and serve as a pass-around.

V, GF, without the bread