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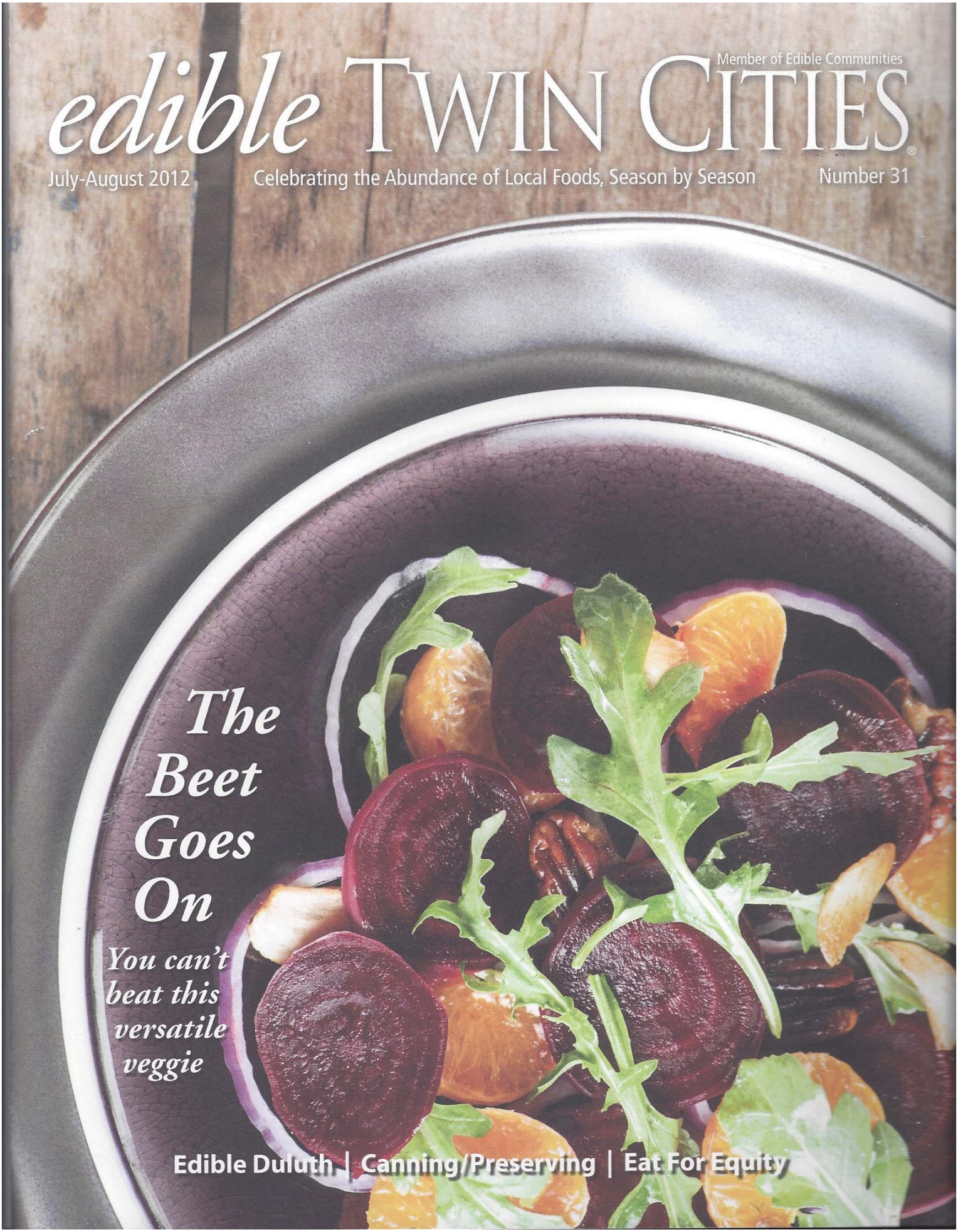
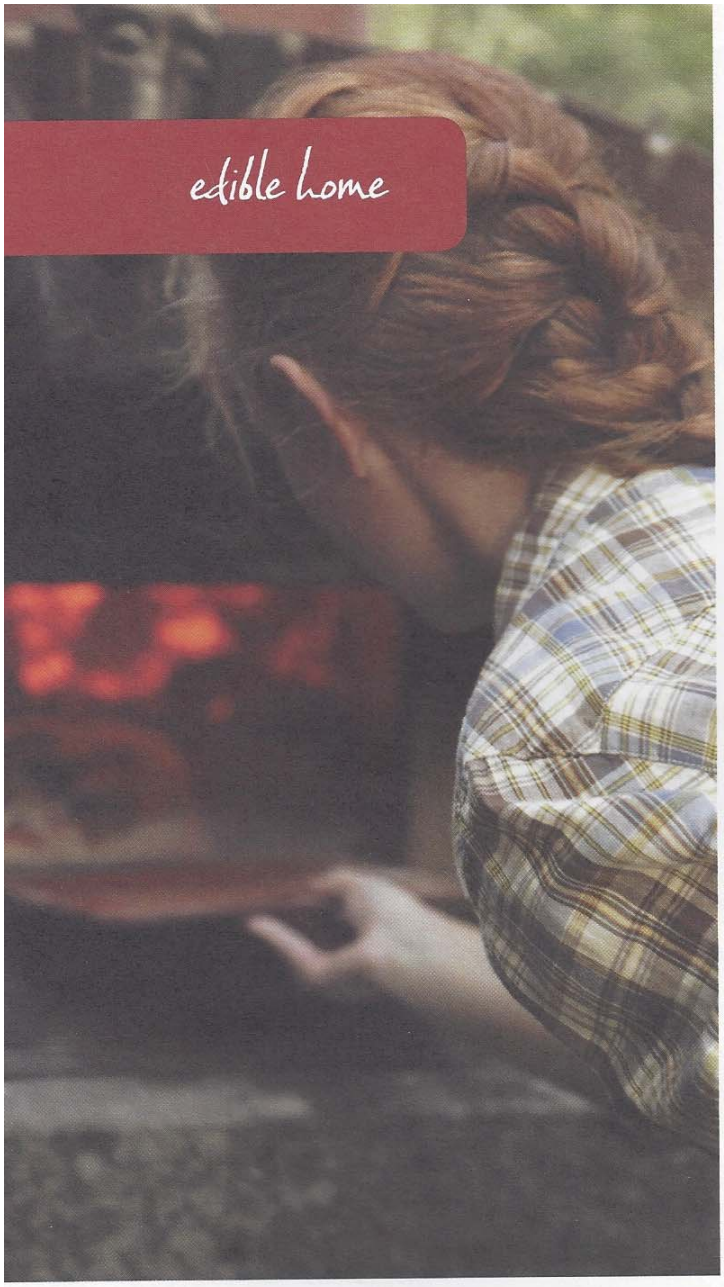
July-August 2012 Celebrating the Abundance of Local Foods, Season by Season Number 31



The Beet Goes On

You can't beat this versatile veggie

Edible Duluth | Canning/Preserving | Eat For Equity



Outdoor, brick ovens are perfect for pizza and bread...and entertaining.
Photos by Paul Markert, Markert Photo, Inc.

Now You're Cooking

Heat up your party with an outdoor pizza oven

BY NANCY CROTTI

Rocky DiGiacomo can bake 100 pizzas in two hours in one oven. He built the oven from scratch in his Minnetonka back yard.

The brick pizza and bread oven was part of a patio project DiGiacomo and his wife, Gigi, embarked on five years ago. They do know about these kinds of projects. They are the owners of DiGiacomo Homes & Restoration, and they build and remodel homes, patios, porches, and what Gigi DiGiacomo, co-owner and interior designer, refers to as outdoor "retreats." The company has won several awards for its exterior patio and porch work (visit www.designbuildmn.com).

Constructed of the same kind of brick used in fireplaces, the DiGiacomos' oven is modeled after the communal bread ovens used all over Europe for centuries. Most of them are gone, but the tradition of outdoor oven-building migrated across the Atlantic Ocean to Quebec. Rocky DiGiacomo read a book about the Canadian ovens and was intrigued.

He and Gigi were further inspired to build their own oven during a trip to Greece, where they saw an outdoor oven in use. They even picked up a small sculpture to use as the keystone for their oven.

Rocky DiGiacomo undertook the oven construction without an oven-building kit. Kits weren't available then but are widely available online now. The design was tricky, so DiGiacomo said he would use a kit if he were to build one for a customer.

The DiGiacomos' oven is four feet wide and five feet deep. They build a wood fire inside it and let it burn two and a half hours to reach the desired temperature to bake a pizza in 45 seconds. DiGiacomo knows the oven is close to being ready for baking when the fire has burned the soot it produced off the oven ceiling.

"You get those bricks up to about 2,000 degrees and that's what does the cooking," he says.

So how did DiGiacomo bake 100 pizzas in two hours? The family hosted a soccer party for their daughter and her friends, who each rolled out the dough and assembled individual pizzas. Rocky baked them, pushing the coals to the rear of the oven first.

DiGiacomo designed the oven so the firebricks wrap all around the interior, including the floor. The bricks hold the heat for hours, even after the fire is extinguished.

PIZZA DOUGH RECIPE

Here's the DiGiacomos' favorite pizza dough recipe, from Williams-Sonoma. The all-purpose dough complements both traditional and non-traditional pizzas.

Ingredients:

- **1** tablespoon active dry yeast
- **3/4** cup plus **2** tablespoons lukewarm water
- **2 3/4** cups all-purpose flour, plus **1/2** cup for working
- **1** teaspoon salt
- **1** tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

Directions:

In a small bowl, dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm water and let stand until slightly foamy, about 10 minutes.

In a large bowl, stir together the 2 3/4 cups flour and the salt and form into a mound. Make a well in the center and add the yeast mixture to the well. Using a fork and stirring in a circular motion, gradually pull the flour into the yeast mixture. Continue stirring until a dough forms.

Lightly flour a work surface with some of the 1/2 cup flour and transfer the dough to it. Using the heel of your hand, knead the dough until it is smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes. Form the dough into a ball.

Brush a large bowl with the olive oil and place the dough in it. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature until doubled in size, 1 to 2 hours.

Turn the dough out onto a surface dusted with the remaining

flour. Punch down the dough and, using your hand, begin to press it out gently into the desired shape. Then, place one hand in the center of the dough and, with the other hand, pull, lift and stretch the dough, gradually working your way all around the edge, until it is the desired thickness, about 1/4 inch thick for a crusty pizza base and 1/2 inch thick for a softer one. Flip the dough over from time to time as your work with it. (Or roll out the dough with a rolling pin.) The dough should be slightly thinner in the middle than at the edge. Lift the edge of the pizza to form a slight rim.

Transfer the dough to a baker's peel or baking sheet, cover with a kitchen towel and let rise again until almost doubled in size, about 20 minutes. Top and bake as directed in your pizza recipe. Makes 1 1/4 lb. dough, enough for a 12-inch thin-crust pizza or a 9-inch thick-crust pizza.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Kitchen Library Series, Pizza, by Lorenza de' Medici (Time-Life Books, 1993).