

# BOSTON COMMON

## DISH

BY VICTORIA ABBOTT RICCARDI

## Growing Trend

Eager to put the freshest ingredients on their guests' plates, many area chefs are plucking veggies, greens, and herbs from their own gardens. Here are a handful of restaurants from among the bounty of New England spots giving new meaning to the term "locally grown."

By Victoria Abbott Riccardi

### AURA

Two floors up from the lobby of the Seaport Hotel is a deck area used for weddings, banquets, sunning, or just relaxing. The deck also houses an herb garden planted in raised, stone-embellished boxes among evergreens and trees. Here, at certain times of the day, you can spot chef Rachel Klein snipping ingredients for her menu at Aura. Klein, who planted the garden, grows all of her favorite herbs, including lemon verbena, garlic, chives, basil, rosemary, lavender, dill, and tarragon. "I love using lots of herbs because they really brighten a dish," says Klein. She adds them to all her salads and in spring offers scallops with wild mushroom, peas, and mint. The restaurant also serves passion fruit and garden mint mojitos. *Aura, 1 Seaport Lane, 617-385-4300; aurarestaurant.com.*

### BOKX 109

The deck outside Hotel Indigo in Newton looks as though it belongs at a posh Moroccan resort. The space is expansive, the pool oh so inviting, and the white-draped cabanas hip, luxurious, and private. Everything on the deck is for hotel guests, including the dozens of herbs, flowers, and tomatoes that go into chef Evan Percoco's American steakhouse fare. The garden grows such unusual herbs as creeping pink thyme, chamomile, and purple sage. And

while treasures like white wonder and green grape tomatoes won't arrive until summer, you can order a spearmint mojito and some purple-sage roast chicken and raise a glass to the coming spring. *BOKX 109 American Prime, Hotel Indigo, 399 Grove Street, Newton, 617-454-3399; bokx109.com.*

### DANTE

Chef-owner Dante de Magistris of Dante restaurant takes his herbs very seriously. Last year his herb containers on the plaza level of the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Cambridge displayed a crop of garlic, chives, marjoram, thyme, and mint for de Magistris's modern Italian menu. One of his must-have stems for spring? Fresh peas, which he'll cook and serve with mushroom, garden mint, and lemon verbena. *Dante, 5 Cambridge Parkway, Cambridge, 617-497-6200; restaurantdante.com.*



BOKX 109 herb salad

### DBAR

Prior to manning the kitchen at Dorchester's Dbar, Christopher Coombs worked at the Inn at Little Washington in Virginia, renowned for its garden-grown fare. "I missed having fresh produce right at my fingertips," says Coombs, "so when I became chef here, I began a garden on the roof." Accessible by a ladder, the roof holds approximately 65 recycled plastic fish containers (two feet wide and three feet long) and various small pots filled with plants. "I start getting seeds around January," says Coombs, "like rosemary, chives, and parsley, and sow them in the attic of the restaurant." After weeks of daily watering, the chef brings his plants outside to create his garden of 23 different herbs, 20 heirloom varieties of tomatoes, and peas, peppers, greens, and squash. "The majority of what we grow is tomatoes, herbs, and arugula," says Coombs, who spends about 20 hours a week working on the garden. "It's not easy, but it makes me very, very happy. Plus, having the garden up there [on the roof] really helps the staff understand what seasonality is all about." One of Coombs's favorite spring dishes? "[Home-grown] white French asparagus, [which we roast,] with escargot and a crème fraîche sauce with parsley and chive flowers." *Dbar, 1236 Dorchester Avenue, Dorchester, 617-265-4490; dbarboston.com.*

### DUNAWAY RESTAURANT AT STRAWBERRY BANKE

"It's a dream come true to be able to walk out the back door and pick produce," says executive chef Evan Hennessey, referring to his three gardens at Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Hennessey, who has worked at Aureole and Café Boulud in New York and Trio in Chicago, enjoys applying his sophisticated cooking techniques to New England ingredients, particularly the herbs, vegetables, and fruits from the property's gardens. This season, Hennessey's menus are dotted with salsify, sunchokes, and tennis ball lettuce, along with earthy, spicy white carrots and Cape nannies, which he'll serve with duck confit. All salads include a generous mix of fresh herbs, which Hennessey also adds to breads and uses as a garnish for raw fish dishes, such as tuna tartar with lemon balm. *Dunaway Restaurant at Strawberry Banke, 66 Marcy Street, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 603-323-6112; dunawayrestaurant.com.*

### HERB EXCEMUM AT GILSON'S

The Gilson Family Homestead in Groton consists of four acres of beautiful and fragrant herb gardens, several greenhouses (including one that's winterized), and flowering trees that not only serve as a bucolic retreat for guests, but also as a place for them to enjoy six-course, herb-rich meals. Offered



