



The Observatory



Los Gatos-Saratoga Observation Nursery School ~ Issue 1 August 2006

Children in the Woods

by Marie Imai, Director

Dear Families,

Welcome to a new year at Mountain School. The teachers are all very excited to meet everyone in their classes and begin our adventure in the woods together. Two events in my life this week make me particularly enthusiastic to return to school. I spent 3 days hiking in the Carson Pass area of the Sierras with Teacher Jane and my friend Tracy, which was a wonderful immersion in another world of amazing wildflowers, mountain lakes and granite, granite, granite everywhere – the signpost of this mountain range. Every summer in my adult life I have spent some time backpacking, hiking or camping in the Sierras and whenever I go it feels like coming home again. What place in nature is home for you? Where can you go to feel restored and better able to handle the stress of daily life with young children?

We are very fortunate to have the Santa Cruz Mountains as our own backyard and I hope that for your children their years at Mountain School will give them the familiarity and sense of belonging to this place where they will always feel nurtured. We have towering redwoods, great oaks, wandering creeks, banana slugs, millipedes and all sorts of wonders for all of us to cherish, love and protect. One must know a place well in order to become passionate about safeguarding it for the future. And we are responsible for raising a new generation who will help care for this small part of our earth.

On Thursday August 17th I heard Richard Louv, the author of “Last Child in the Woods”, speak in downtown San Jose and he was so inspiring that I urge you all to put September 28 on your calendar now when he will be speaking again at Foothill College at 7:30pm. His message is so important for all of us that I hope most everyone in our school will be able to attend. I was shocked by his description of how separated children have become from nature in the last 20 years and delighted by his hopeful message that we can and must reverse this trend for the health of our children.

(continued on page 3)

Reminiscing

by Tracy Halgren, Board Chair

On behalf of the board, welcome to the 2006-07 school year. I find myself at the tail end of our vacation and it's hard to believe the summer is almost over and a new school year is about to begin.

My sons, Joshua (2) and Aiden (5), and I started our vacation in Minnesota at my parents' lake cabin. While there I found myself reminiscing about my childhood, growing up with a dad who was an entomologist, and a mom who loved to identify every animal, flower and bird. A childhood of vacations made up of camping, backpacking or staying at my grandparents' cabin.

While reminiscing, I started looking more closely at my own kids' childhood. I realized my thoughts kept to Mountain School and how it has allowed my kids to experience some of the things I had when I was a child. I thought about Aiden experiencing his first banana slug in Teacher Karyn's class, his first tentative climb up the bunny hill and then his more confident climbs in the 3/4's class and the wonderfully long hikes he took in the 4/5's class with the added enjoyment of plant, animal and bird identification.

One of the fondest memories I have of growing up is backpacking on a small island in the middle of Lake Superior called Isle Royale. Last year Aiden got the chance to hear the book “Paddle to the Sea” in

(continued on page 2)

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

Children in the Woods

Page 1

Reminiscing

Page 1

Leave No Child Inside

Page 3

Fall Family Photos

Page 3

Packing It All In

Page 4

Mini-Course: Together We Prepare

Page 4

Children as Caretakers of the Earth

Page 5

Calendar

Page 5

What We CAN Do!

Page 6

Book Review

Page 8

Scholastic Books

Page 8

Science With Children: Berry Ink

Page 8

Volunteer Corner

Page 9

Letter From The Editor

Page 9

Tortilla Soup

Page 10

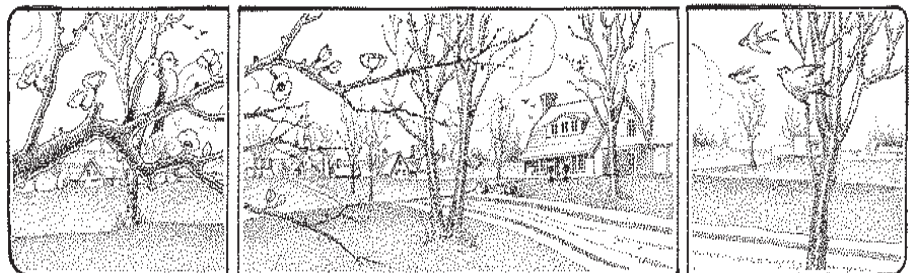
(Reminiscing, continued)

Teacher Marie's class. This book follows a little wooden Indian sitting in the canoe on his journey as he "paddles to the sea" through the various Great Lakes. Paddle's journey starts out in Lake Superior and the book shows kids that Lake Superior actually looks like the outline of a wolf, and Isle Royale is the wolf's eye. I told Aiden I had backpacked on that Island, and he made sure we got the chance to visit it while we were in the area. What a joy to have shared this precious memory with my two sons. I kept thinking how wonderful it was that Mountain School was what prompted me to share those fond memories.

As our stay in Minnesota ended we met up with my husband, Chris, and traveled to Vancouver Island. We have been here now two weeks and I find myself thinking about Joshua starting Mountain School this fall and all the fun things he has yet to experience. I have watched Joshua get excited when Aiden shows him a banana slug and I look forward to seeing his expression when Teacher Karyn shows the class their first banana slug at Savannah Channelle. I've watched Joshua climb up and down a steep cliff to get to the beach below our house, and I look forward to watching him climb the bunny hill at Saratoga Springs. I can just imagine that look of awe when he realizes how high he has climbed and the sheer joy of the ride down the back side. I've watched Joshua explore and find interesting plants and bugs and I think about how fun it will be to observe him doing this with his peers at school.

As our vacation is ending I am excited for the new school year to start. Excited to watch Aiden head off to kindergarten ready to conquer new kinds of challenges, and excited to watch Joshua get his first real taste of Mountain School. I am so grateful for the opportunities Mountain School has given me to share part of my childhood with my kids. It brings me closer to a community of friends that share my same passion for the outdoors. It gives me the opportunity to observe our child and gain insight during those challenging times. It also gives me time to be outside, time to simply watch my child play, and time to see him grow.

I hope that Mountain School will become as meaningful to you and your family as it has been for our family. Welcome to this magical place and have a wonderful year! ☺



Leave No Child Inside: An Evening with Richard Louv

Author of Last Child in the Woods; Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder

Date: Thursday, September 28th
7:30 pm
Location: Smithwick Theater at
Foothill College, Los Altos
Admission: \$5 (includes parking for
advanced tickets)

Richard Louv, author of Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, speaks about the transformation in the relationship between children and nature, how society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature. That unintended message is delivered in schools, families, even organizations devoted to the outdoors, and codified into legal and regulatory structures of our communities.

He also describes the exciting, new body of scientific evidence demonstrating just how important direct contact with the outdoors is to healthy child development, touching on such health issues as ADHD, child obesity, stress, creativity and cognitive functioning.

To stimulate a "Leave No Child Inside" movement, he offers practical suggestions for action by parents, grandparents, government agencies, conservationists, urban planners, educators and others concerned about the future of childhood and the earth itself

Tickets for the Richard Louv event can be purchased online at www.waldorfpenninsula.org/calendar/event_pages/richard_louv.html Tickets are \$5 and advance tickets include the \$2 parking fee. Advance tickets will be emailed. ☞



(Children in the Woods, continued)

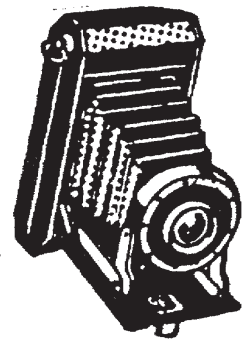
He reported that there are new studies showing that symptoms of ADHD are reduced when children spend more time outdoors and that cognitive development and creativity increases. Students whose schools have outdoor education cements score better on standardized tests than those who don't. Our senses are stimulated and our spirits are revitalized (adults and children) when we have enough unstructured time outdoors. When asked at the end of his talk what parents can give their children for their birthday to help them enjoy the out of doors, Louv replied "ourselves". So I congratulate you on taking time from your busy life to come outdoors to school with your child every week and experience the wonders of life together. You will never regret it!

Love, Marie

PS: Tickets and information about his talk are available at 650/464 4388 or visit www.waldorfpenninsula.org ☞

Fall Family Photos

by Jen Mateus
School Photos Coordinator



Saturday, September 23rd
and
Sunday, October 8th

This is a wonderful opportunity for Mountain School families to have professional family photos taken. Susan J. Weiland will be taking colored family photos, by appointment only, in the beautiful outdoor location of Oak Meadow Park. To schedule a sitting please call Susan directly after September 1st at 408/996-1933, Mon.-Fri. 10am – 8pm, or email s.weiand@ix.netcom.com.

Packing It All In

by Kristin Mitchell, MS PT
Registration Chair

Time to pack those backpacks for Mountain School again. You need a change of clothes or two, shoes, socks, and sometimes a lunch. Can you get a big enough backpack to hold everything? Most likely you will. In fact the backpack your child is carrying may be so big that's it's hurting his back. Both the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and the American Occupational Therapy Association suggest a maximum pack weight of only 15% of body weight. This study was done for children 7 years and older, but I believe the sooner we start good practices, the better our children will be in the future.

For a 30 pound child, he should only be carrying 4.5 pounds. That is not very much considering all the things we need to get through a day at Mountain School. More important than the math, is observing your child and his or her posture when carrying their pack. If you see a child's posture has changed, if they are leaning forward, hunched or rounded shoulders, or strain forward with their head and neck, then the pack is too heavy. If your child thinks he's a funny turtle, the pack is too big.

Here are a few suggestions to try this year.

- When purchasing a backpack for your child, the backpack should end above the waist and should sit lower than the neck. I have seen many smaller backpacks at REI and the Army Surplus stores.
- Have the child carry the lunch box (if needed) in one hand and their boots in the other. This takes some of the weight out of the pack.
- Consider carrying a proper backpack for yourself for the extra shoes and boots.

We love fostering independence and responsibility in our children. We want our children to carry their school items, and not for the parents to become pack mules! However, we must be mindful of our children's bodies now to help them grow. ☺

Mini-Course: Together We Prepare

Emergency Preparedness and First Aid Training Community Disaster Education (CDE) Services.

Wednesday, October 4th:

7-9 pm (location TBD)

Speaker: John Buckel,

American Red Cross Instructor

The devastation and tragic loss of life caused, most recently, by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are recurring reminders that we must all take the necessary steps to prepare ourselves and our families for potential emergencies. This general disaster preparedness workshop will focus on how the community and the Red Cross can prepare for and respond to a disaster, with a focus on the remote mountain setting of our school locations. There are five key elements to emergency preparedness: Make a Plan, Build a Kit, Get Trained, Volunteer and Give Blood. First aid training without CPR includes bleeding control and treatment of burns, fractures, strains, sprains, seizures, shock, heat and cold emergencies and poisoning. We would like to make emergency preparedness as easy as possible for you. Emergency car supply and backpack kits will be made available to you for purchase from the Red Cross at this event.

Remember, it is up to you to prepare yourself and your family. At a minimum you should:

- Have a family emergency plan.
- Know the emergency plans and procedures at your home, work and your children's school.
- Keep a small amount of cash handy (no electricity = no bank transactions and no ATMs)
- Maintain at least 1/2 tank of gas in your car at all times (most fuel in the valley requires an electric pump for delivery – no electricity = no gas)
- Have an emergency kit and stockpile emergency food and water (be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours minimum)
- Always have 10 to 30 day "buffer" supply of critical medicine and life-sustaining medical items
- The most important emergency decisions are the things you decide to do NOW prior to an emergency! ☺

Children as Caretakers of the Earth

Hosted by Betty Peck and Anna Rainville

Kindergarten Forum
Guest Speaker: Liz Murray

September 23rd
9:00am - 2:30pm

Liz Murray, author of Cultivating Space, the Soul of the Garden, returns to the Kindergarten Forum to share her experiences of working with the children in the Ecuadorian Amazon rain forest. As an author, landscape gardener, photographer and artist, Liz facilitated a unique project to assist the Archur people in helping to save their forest. She brought art supplies to the children; this was their first experience in using paint and paper. They drew the illustrations for an Archur myth that would be published for the first time in their own language, Nantu and Auju, How the Moon and the Potoo Bird Came to Be. Liz will tell her remarkable story and she will present practical suggestions and activities for our own children to care for the earth. Her expertise includes creating gardens, coordinating community celebrations to honor the earth and recognizing sacred passages such as birth and death.

There will also be garden crafts with Njeri and a Salute to the Autumn Equinox with Margaret More.

Reservations Required: \$40 donation. Call Betty Peck for reservations 408/867-3156



Calendar

SCHOOL BEGINS

Wednesday, September 6th

BOARD MEETING

*Tuesday, September 12th
7:00pm location to be determined*

FAMILY PHOTOS

*Saturday, September 23rd
and Sunday, October 8th*

See page 3 "Fall Family Photos" for more information.

A DISCUSSION WITH RICHARD LOUV

*Thursday, September 28
7:30pm at Foothill College*

Tickets for the Richard Louv event can be purchased online at www.waldorfpeninsula.org/calendar/event_pages/richard_louv.html. Tickets are \$5 and advance tickets include the \$2 parking fee. Advance tickets will be emailed. For more information see "Saving Our Children" on page 7. (Note: Optional meeting)

3/4s, SAT 2s & WED 2s WORKDAY

*Sunday, October 1st
at the school house*

More info to follow. If you are unable to attend please contact Tessa Arguijo (Workday Coordinator) to make other arrangements. 408/356-2478 or arguijo@comcast.net

FALL PICNIC

Sunday October 15th

Mark your calendars...more info to follow

GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday, October 24th

"How The Young Brain Learns" with Kenneth Wesson. Time and place TBD. For more info see page 9.



What We CAN Do!

by Jane Krejci, Friday 2's Assistant Teacher

A year ago many of us heard James Steyer of Common Sense Media talk about the powerful impact of media on our children's development (including the brain), behavior, body image, and physical health. He challenged us to educate ourselves. There is a body of research and circumstantial evidence regarding the health (in the broadest sense) of our children. Here are just a few of the recent findings....and alternatives.

LEARNING

Findings

1. ADD (attention deficit disorder) and TV - A study of 2600 children, ages 1-3 years, was reported in the April 2004 Pediatrics. The more television that toddlers watch, the more likely they are to have ADD when they are school age. The overall rate of ADD at age 7 was about 10 percent. It was 3 times higher for the top 10-20% of television viewers and increased by about 9 percent for every additional hour of daily television watched. Other factors are probably linked to ADD, but avoiding excess television viewing in the first years is wise and something we can control.

2. "BabyFirst TV" is a 24 hour commercial free channel dedicated to babies, toddlers and their parents. For \$9.95 a month you can "nurture important skills from language to math to creativity." I have not viewed these programs. My questions are: "If children are watching TV, what are they not doing, e.g. exploring nature, handling real objects, interacting with you, creating their own play? Are these not a more developmentally appropriate way to learn?"

N.B. The American Academy of Pediatrics officially recommends that children under age 2 watch no television at all. Their concern - as well as noted author Joseph Chilton Pierce - has more to do with the medium than the content. The rapidly shifting images and bombardment of sound affect the way children learn at an important time of brain development.

Alternative

Go outside. Nature is a "natural" antidote to ADD.

Author Richard Louv (Last Child in the Woods) urges

parents (and teachers and grandparents) to take their children outside and connect with nature. Children have a natural affinity for the earth; yet many are deprived of the chance to experience the natural world first hand. Studies by the Human-Environmental Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois and the California-based State Education and Environmental Roundtable show significant changes when students are engaged with nature. They have found reductions in symptoms of ADD (attention deficit disorder), enhanced problem-solving, critical thinking and decision making skills, improved test scores, better class performance and a higher level of creativity.

BEHAVIOR

Findings

1. Violent Video Games & Aggression - Craig Anderson, Ph.D. summarizes video game research over the last 40 years and finds that players exhibit increased aggressive behavior, thoughts and affect, increased physiological arousal, and a decrease in pro social (helping) behavior. For a more complete summary go to www.apa.org/science/psa/sb-anderson.html

2. Sleep - Kaiser Family Foundation studies report that 83% of children 6 months to 6 years use some form of electronic media with screens in a typical day. Average screen time a day is 2 hours. 33% of children under six have TVs in their room. Of this number, 37% are put to bed with the TV on the majority of the time to lull them to sleep.

A study released in September 1999, Pediatrics suggests that the longer children sit in front of the TV, the less likely they are to sleep well.

Alternatives

- Establish your own family guidelines for media use.
- Engage in more physical activity outside in the most unstructured way possible.
- Follow a bedtime routine that is consistent. e.g. bath, story time, reminiscing about the day, soft music.
- Play board games and other family games; schedule family nights with music, skits, art, etc.

(What We CAN Do!, continued)

HEALTH

Findings

1. A study published in July 2004 Lancet reports that children between the ages of 5 and 15 who watch more than two hours of TV a day are more likely to be more obese, out of shape and have higher cholesterol than their peers at age 26.
2. A University College London researcher studied more than 10,000 people and found that the amount of TV they watched as a child was a predictor of obesity later in life. This study goes back 30 years. Imagine what the results would be today!
3. Factors contributing to obesity are less physical activity and diet, especially the junk foods promoted on television. The increase in childhood obesity in the past decades parallels the increase in organized sports (and the accompanying snack/junk food). Food choices and habits are formed early!
4. Corporations have been increasingly involved in school programs, often in return for selling their products (exclusively) or at the very least making their brand visible. Many schools and communities are fighting to have soft drinks and unhealthy snack foods unavailable to students. There are also studies on health and active living funded by commercial interests. Researchers dependent on such funding feel tremendous pressure to publish findings compatible with the interests of these companies.

Alternatives

- Limit screen time - TV, video, games. Replace it with lots of free, unstructured play time.
- Make available healthy snacks and drinks (fruit, veggies, water)
- Support incorporating media literacy into the school curriculum. This helps children to learn how to think critically and to make good choices and decisions

The media in all its forms will continue to be an integral part of our society. We have the option and responsibility to set the limits for our children and families. Our Mountain School community works to promote healthy families. Making informed choices and decisions about

media (what, where, when) are within our control. We need to exercise it.

RESOURCES

Richard Louv (*Last Child in the Woods*) will be speaking at Foothill College on Thursday September 28th. Check the Newsletter for more information.

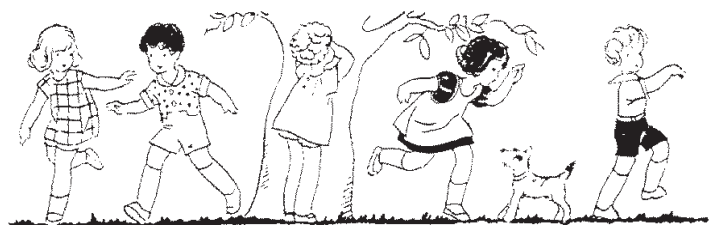
TiVo's KidZone (for TiVo subscribers) creates a personalized TV area where families can decide which TV programs they want their children to watch. In a few minutes, parents can set up what amounts to an individualized TVchannel. This is a positive - common sense - approach to television viewing.

Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org) will e-mail you free a weekly newsletter with recommended media for every age and stage. There are reviews by child development experts and parents and kids. There are parent tested ideas and solutions to your media dilemmas. They also recommend to KidZone each week a new list of shows they think are age appropriate. Also check out Common Sense Media's tips for creating healthy media diet.

Nutrition Action Health Letter published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (www.cspinet.org) publishes an excellent monthly newsletter. It is an independent, non-profit consumer health group (no advertising, no government or industry funding).

Susan Rogers (medialiteracy.com) urges us to speak out when we encounter something that is not healthy for families (e.g. inappropriate messages in stores). She suggests the following guidelines:

- (1) Speak firmly and politely.
- (2) Focus and stick to one point.
- (3) Use phrases like "not family friendly" or "not what your company stands for"
- (4) Provide a solution.
- (5) Leave your name and contact information. ☒



Book Review

by Jane Krejci

Believing It All by Marc Parent

“Moving to the rhythm of a child is a dance of remembrance, tracing us back to the wholeness we once held as a reflex.”

Marc Parent writes lyrically of daily life with his two preschool sons, Casey and Owen. He is a keen observer and a wonderful storyteller. The book will make you laugh, shed a tear, shake your head, appreciate your child anew - and remember. You can read a chapter here and there, but it is worth reading it all eventually. It is so real!

“I never thought the greatest teacher I could ever hope to discover was a child.” ☞

Scholastic Books

by Jane Johnson, Scholastic Books Coordinator

Welcome to/back to our wonderful school!

One great way to help support your child's learning, and support our school in providing the awesome and unique learning environment we have, is to purchase books through our Scholastic program. These books make for perfect reading opportunities with your child/children, and they make great gifts, too. Start thinking about those birthday parties, holiday gifts and cozy times together. They even have some available for less than a dollar. Watch for the different age level flyers soon with Scholastic's offerings. They come out approximately 6 times a year with different themes. New this year: They even have a secure, direct online ordering option! More information will be included in the packet you receive at your 1st circle meeting.

If you have any questions, please contact me at jcwjohns@yahoo.com or 408/268-9878.

Warmly,
Jane Johnson
Scholastic Books Coordinator ☞

Science With Children: Berry Ink

from the “Science Experiments for the Young Child” binder put together by Alice H.

This is the way ink was made by the pioneers. To use your ink, you will need a fountain pen or a straight pen.

What You Need:

- ripe blueberries, blackberries, cherries or strawberries
- paper cups
- baby food jars or yogurt containers with lids
- spoon
- paper towels

What To Do:

1. Take the stems and leaves off the berries. Put the berries in a paper cup.
2. Press the berries with the back of the spoon until they are mushy.
3. Add a little water to the berries. (the more water you add, the lighter the color of the ink will be.)
4. Stir the berries and water with the spoon until they are well mixed.
5. Lay a square of paper towel over a small jar. Push the towel down into the jar.
6. Slowly pour the berry mixture through the paper towel into the jar.
7. When all the liquid has drained through the paper towel, throw the towel away. The liquid in the jar is your ink. Put the lid on the jar until you're ready to use the ink.
8. Try out different berries to see which kind makes the best ink. Is the color of the ink what you expected when you chose the berries?

Note: if you don't have a fountain pen, would a small paint brush work? ☞



Volunteer Corner

As most of you know, Mountain School wouldn't run without you, our parents. Our Board is staffed with parent volunteers. Some of those positions could use a hand from time to time. In this new section of the newsletter we'd like to reach out to those of you willing to help out from time to time. Here are three ways you could help:

Assist the Programs Chairs

Would you be willing to volunteer at a speaker event you are already planning to attend? We need a committee of 7-8 parents: two volunteers per event who will assist the Programs Co-Chairs, Linda Aggarwal and Marina Rush, with hosting and facilitating on the night of the event.

Duties may include:

- Hosting and greeting speaker
- Manage room setup/take down
- Introduce mini-course speaker
- Managing/providing the participant sign up process
- Assisting speaker in handling materials
- Facilitating refreshments (General Meetings only)
- Post directional signs to room
- Check and/or fix AV and special equipment for General Meeting speaker

Volunteers should arrive at 6:00 p.m. for General

Meetings, or 6:15 p.m. for mini-courses. Most of the mini-courses will be in class rooms where the seating is already set up. Doors will open between 6:30 and 6:45 p.m. The introductions will begin at 7:00 p.m. The program will conclude at 9:00 p.m. Please join our committee to help make this year's Programs a huge success. You may contact Marina Rush (408/551-0066) or Linda Aggarwal (408/358-1099) directly to volunteer and select which event you would like to assist with.

Coordinate Aquí Dinner Nights

At the end of the school year last year we had our first ever "Aquí Fund-raising Dinner Night". Those who attended had a great time. The food is fabulous, the restaurant very family friendly, and reasonably priced. We'd like to do it again, maybe a couple of times a year. We're looking for someone who could coordinate the date and get the word out to the school. If you're interested please contact Tracy Halgren (408/867-2701).

Guinea Pigs

If your child is asking for a pet, but you're not ready to commit to one of your own, this is the perfect opportunity. Our much loved guinea pigs need to be cared for year round, even when we're not at the schoolhouse. Our guinea pigs are looking for loving families to help care for the guinea pigs while we are at our outdoor locations and over holiday breaks. If you are willing to help, please contact David Casper (408/353-9728). ☞

From the Editor

Welcome, welcome, welcome. I hope everyone had a wonderful summer! I look forward to seeing old friends, and making new ones, and seeing the joy on Jacob's face as he plays in the creek and sand alongside his friends. It feels as if we're coming home.

I encourage you to help keep the spirit of Mountain School alive. Participate.

Is there something you would like to see in the newsletter? Do you have a recipe, story, poem, field trip, or information you'd like to share? The deadline for the next newsletter is Friday,

September 15th. Please send all submissions for consideration to mtnmama@garlic.com.

Warmly,

*Sonia Casper
Editor*



Tortilla Soup

from Cook's Illustrated March 2005
submitted by Mary Matlack

Despite its somewhat lengthy ingredient list, this recipe is very easy to prepare. If you desire a soup with mild spiciness, trim the ribs and seeds from the jalapeño (or omit the jalapeño altogether) and use the minimum amount of chipotle in adobo sauce (1 teaspoon, pureed with the tomatoes in step 3). Our preferred brand of low-sodium chicken broth is Swanson's Natural Goodness. If advance preparation suits you, the soup can be completed short of adding the shredded chicken to the pot at the end of step 3. Return the soup to a simmer over medium-high heat before proceeding. The tortilla strips and the garnishes are best prepared the day of serving.

Makes about 9 cups, serving 6

Tortilla Strips

- 8 corn tortillas (6-inch), cut into 1/2-inch-wide strips
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- Table salt

Soup

- 2 split bone-in, skin-on chicken breasts (about 1 1/2 pounds) or 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 1 1/4 pounds), skin removed and well trimmed of excess fat
- 8 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 very large white onion (about 1 pound), trimmed of root end, quartered, and peeled
- 4 medium cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 sprigs epazote, fresh, or 8 to 10 sprigs fresh cilantro plus 1 sprig
- fresh oregano
- Table salt
- 2 medium tomatoes, cored and quartered
- 1/2 medium jalapeño chile
- 1 chipotle chile en adobo, plus up to 1 tablespoon adobo sauce
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Garnishes

- 1 lime, cut into wedges
- 1 Hass avocado, diced fine
- 8 ounces cotija cheese, crumbled, or Monterey Jack cheese, diced fine
- fresh cilantro leaves
- minced jalapeño pepper
- Mexican crema or sour cream

Crisp strips of oven-fried corn tortillas add crunch and heft to a bowl of potent Mexican chicken soup flavored with chiles, tomatoes, and fresh herbs.

1. For the Tortilla Strips: Adjust oven rack to middle position; heat oven to 425 degrees. Spread tortilla strips on rimmed baking sheet; drizzle with oil and toss until evenly coated. Bake until strips are deep golden brown and crisped, about 14 minutes, rotating pan and shaking strips (to redistribute) halfway through baking time. Season strips lightly with salt; transfer to plate lined with several layers paper towels.

2. For the Soup: While tortilla strips bake, bring chicken, broth, 2 onion quarters, 2 garlic cloves, epazote, and 1/2 teaspoon salt to boil over medium-high heat in large saucepan; reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until chicken is just cooked through, about 20 minutes. Using tongs, transfer chicken to large plate. Pour broth through fine-mesh strainer; discard solids in strainer. When cool enough to handle, shred chicken into bite-sized pieces; discard bones.

3. Puree tomatoes, 2 remaining onion quarters, 2 remaining garlic cloves, jalapeño, chipotle chile, and 1 teaspoon adobo sauce in food processor until smooth. Heat oil in Dutch oven over high heat until simmering; add tomato/onion puree and 1/8 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring frequently, until mixture has darkened in color, about 10 minutes. Stir strained broth into tomato mixture, bring to boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer to blend flavors, about 15 minutes. Taste soup; if desired, add up to 2 teaspoons additional adobo sauce. Add shredded chicken and simmer until heated through, about 5 minutes. To serve, place portions of tortilla strips in bottom of individual bowls and ladle soup into bowls; pass garnishes separately.