

“What are micro-greens?”

Invariably that's the first question Darrell Joseph of Bella Verdi Farms hears when folks come to sample his specialty produce at the Westlake Farmers Market. Market goers learn that micro-greens are very young versions of arugula, cabbage, mustard, chard and many other leaf greens. Grown in his space-age greenhouse just outside of Austin, micro-greens are harvested when they are only ten days old. These beautiful greens are sought by chefs for their intense flavor, interesting texture and nutritional value. All that interesting information becomes secondary once folks taste the “micros.” Then they just want to buy them.

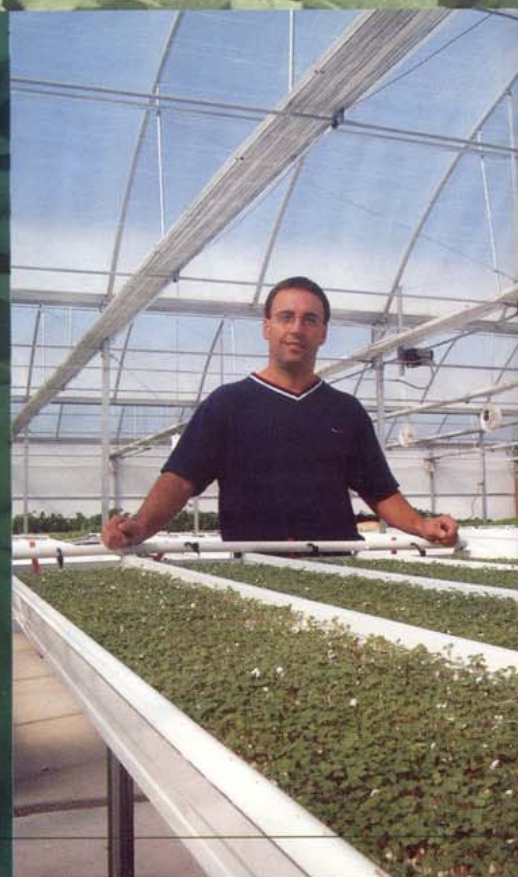
“How do I use them?” is usually the next question. Using micro-greens in salads is obvious, but people get excited when they hear about using the tiny produce in sandwiches, on roasted fish, pizza and virtually anywhere one would use parsley or other finishing herbs. “The Farmers Market is the perfect place for us to educate people on cooking with micro-greens and we get great feedback on how our customers are using them,” said Steve Cox, one of Darrell's partners. “Often what we hear is that customers didn't get around to experimenting because they ate the ‘micros’ right out of the box.”

“Almost everybody that tries them loves them,” says Darrell, one of the owners of Bella Verdi Farms and the operator of their 13,000 square foot greenhouse in Dripping Springs. Bella Verdi is an organically principled hydroponics grower using collected rainwater and no pesticides or herbicides. “We're committed to the highest quality products possible, as evidenced by our HACCP compliant greenhouse and pack-house facility.”

Bella Verdi Farms offers a large number of micro-green varieties including mustard, kohlrabi, arugula, broccoli and cabbage, but their most popular items are the mixes. “The Mediterranean Mix and the Asian Mix sell out almost every week,” explains Darrell.

Bella Verdi's products will appear at Whole Foods beginning in November, but they're not planning to leave the Westlake Farmers Market. “The weekly interaction with our customers is very important to us,” says Darrell. “We can try out new product offerings and get feedback that is very helpful to us... plus the market is a lot of fun!”

In addition to Steve Cox, Darrell has two other partners, Steve Vidal and Josie Appleton. Visit their web site at www.bellaverdifarms.com.



By Pamela Boyar

Pamela Boyar is founder and Market Director of the Westlake Farmers Market. She has been working with the small family farmer since 1980. Westlake Farmers Market was established in 1997 and is the largest-grossing grower-only farmers market in the state of Texas. She encourages everyone to eat healthy, local, and organic whenever possible.