

Pencil leeks and wasabi flowers are all in a day's work for Margy Abbot, writes **Dianne Mattsson**

A growth industry

MARGY Abbot is talking to one of her favourite growers. "Go hard on flowers," she advises. "And keep the micro-herbs coming."

They are tips worth heeding because Margy, a dynamo food wholesaler, is also a specialist at spotting food trends.

Margy is at the centre of a newly refined food chain, working as a conduit between kitchens and growers.

Her advice means growers can plant based on credible feedback from chefs, "rather than guessing", says Michelle Vidau of Herbivorous, with market gardens at Darlington and Hindmarsh Valley.

"This way, I don't take a risk on new varieties and spend months eating things like lemon basil myself because it doesn't sell," Michelle says.

Margy and husband Chris, formerly a farmer on the West Coast, own a fast-growing fruit and vegetable wholesale firm, AMJ Produce at Pooraka.

With a crystal ball informed by a keen eye on world trends, food TV, culinary magazines and, most of all, just talking to the best chefs, Margy has met demand for many exotic edible treats. She tracks down extraordinary foods such as the most minute of micro-herbs, baby turnips and tiny yellow beets, sweet leaf (stevia) and pencil leeks, and has filled some quirky requests such as cherry blossoms and cherries



Extraordinary edibles: Margy Abbot from AMJ Produce with edible flowers. Picture: Mark Brake

on the branch, wasabi flowers (leaves and stalks), rice-paddy herbs, purple carrots and popcorn (sweetcorn shoots grown and picked in the dark).

She has a source for pansies, violas, squash blossoms and, take note, her prediction for the next rage in flavour on the plate – coriander blooms.

These are the exclusive crops that have been critical to the success of chefs such as Peter Gilmore of Quay restaurant in Sydney, which rose again this

year to number 27 in the S.Pellegrino Top 50 restaurants in the world. Peter was recently seen scattering his favourite tiny blooms into a squid and scallop dish in a *MasterChef* masterclass.

Margy says the flower trend is not as evident in homes "yet", so supplies are limited. But she invites passionate entertainers to call her for up-to-the-minute produce.

Michelle at Herbivorous offers the same service, and will

even plant specifically for large functions and weddings. Margy and Chris are sending a lot of local supplies beyond SA borders, including to a number of oil rigs and even to Uluru chefs.

When Chris and Margy took over AMJ about seven years ago, the company, despite its foothold in SA for some 75 years, "was in bad shape".

"We put all our energy into re-building the business and its reputation," says Margy.

Their unshakeable faith is in SA's food triangle: grower to wholesaler, to chefs.

"Our chefs deserve to have everything the interstate chefs have," she says. The spin-off is that growers such as Herbivorous also supply local stores, the Central Market and Willunga Farmers Market.

★ Margy Abbot, 0418 833 351, www.amjproduce.com.au

★ Herbivorous, www.willungafarmersmarket.com/81.html

SHOP, SHOP gourmet

SPREAD THE WORD

BACKYARD Bread's wood-oven croutons are made in the Cobdogla backyard of Colleen and Peter Johnson in seven regional flavours, such

as wattleseed balsamic onion, pictured. Good bases for cheese/dip platters, 80g packs, \$8.65; ph 8354 1622, info@backyardbread.com.au



indulgence

TRIPLE THE TASTE

AN SA icon just got bigger. The fruchoc by Robem Menz now comes in supersize choc balls – triple the usual size and true to the 60-year-old

recipe. You could argue this means one will be enough. Good luck with that. Bags, 350g, RRP \$6.35 on confectionery stands.



COOK'S CALENDAR

MUSHIE MANIA

Mushrooms are popping up everywhere, especially on restaurant menus. Officially, Mushroom Mania is a July food campaign but the past success of the annual string of events and special menus already has chefs featuring everything from portobellos to enoki in a bigger way than usual on seasonal lists. More than 300 restaurants, pubs, cafes and markets have joined the "mania" in this state. Just a few events are:

★ Sunday, July 11: A Crown of Mushrooms lunch at Spice n Ice, \$45; ph 8447 8540.

★ Tuesday, July 13: Funghi Fun with Judyta, Phore Seasons, \$45.00; ph 8242 2222

★ Friday, July 15: Mushroom Bazaar at the Spice Kitchen, 6 courses, \$55; ph 8431 4288.

★ Tuesday, July 20: Long Lunch @ The Gilbert St Hotel, \$50; ph 8231 9909.

★ Sunday, July 25: Long Lunch @ Assaggio, \$65.00; ph 8272 4748. For information and a full event calendar, www.mushroommania.com.au.

TEACH 'EM YOUNG

A children's cooking class with Peta Heine, author *We Love Food at Outdoors On Parade*, Norwood. The focus is on the benefits of home-grown veg and herbs, easy snacks and meals.

Tuesday, July 6, 11.30am-1pm, \$59.95 includes lunch and a copy of Peta's book. (\$20 for extra children in the family not needing a book). Ph 8362 8822, www.outdoorsonparade.com.au.

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