

ACCULTURATION

In Bigas Luna's Spanish feature film *Jamón, Jamón*, a macho, hairy-chested *torero*-in-training is seduced by a mature adulteress, who sticks a clove of garlic in his mouth.

Ozzie and Harriet wouldn't do that. There was no garlic on the Mayflower. Those of us tainted by the prejudices of our Anglo forebears are either staunch, fundamentalist carriers of the flame of salt-and-pepper Puritanism—or, like degenerate Catholics, gluttons, ravishing the forbidden fruits of our deprived upbringing. As Arthur Baer once said, "There is no such thing as a little garlic."

Then again maybe it's just a plebe thang. In Spain, the stinking rose was traditionally food for the poor: "No one ever poisoned a guy's garlic soup," says one proverb. Garlic is an integral part of cuisine and you're not apt to hear complaints about garlic breath. Rather, it's said, "Garlic soup has seven virtues: it's cheap, it satisfies hunger, it doesn't make you thirsty, it helps you to sleep, to digest, it never makes you angry and it adds color to your face."

English proverbs from up *allium*, "Vulgarity is the garlic in the salad of taste," says Cyril Connolly, or "What garlic is to food, insanity is to art."

Spanish proverbs recall that "The best garlic is planted with curses," and "As for the countryman, take away his bread before his garlic."

It's still a deeply divided world: those who worship garlic and those who would ward it off with a garlic wreath—if they didn't hate garlic so much. And it's not just a Euro thing. The Japanese and Koreans don't see eye to eye because of little things like World War II and "comfort slaves," but perhaps garlic's the real reason. Koreans are a garlic-eating people, the Japanese are not. All that divides them is the Sea of Japan and a little breeze.

—Brett Allan King

Since 1979 this small town in Northern California has hosted the annual Gilroy Garlic Festival. Every year thousands of Pilgrims descend to consume garlic pie, garlic wine, garlic mashed potatoes, garlic ice cream... you get the idea. There is nothing so sacred that it can't be improved with a little garlic.

According to the Gilroy Chamber of Commerce, 90 percent of all garlic grown in the United States comes out of California, and most of that \$54 plus million industry grows within one hundred miles of Gilroy.

"*Sembra l'all per giner, o perdràs molts diners.*" The Catalan proverb translates, "Plant garlic in January or you'll lose lots of money." But Gilroy is not Barcelona, and in Gilroy the "early crop" gets planted in November and the "late crop" in December. Garlic seeds are difficult to come by, but that is of little concern since garlic is usually grown by planting the individual cloves. Once the long green stalks fall over, the bulbs are ripe for harvesting. They are pulled out of the ground and hung up in a *ristra* to dry. You should store the bulbs in a bag (paper, not plastic) but not in the refrigerator. Garlic kept in a cool, dark, dry place with plenty of circulation should keep for six months to a year.

"Less is grown here than in other areas," says Carolyn Tognetti, Gilroy's retail Joan of Garlic and co-owner of Garlic World, "but it all comes through Gilroy to the processing plants."

The Tognetti Family may have started it all with their roadside fruit stand, where they sold cherries, corn and the stinking rose. But these days Garlic World is just one of numerous garlic-spe-

cific businesses in the area, including three large processing plants, and a heavenly host of smaller packing facilities and garlic offshoot industries begat by the festival.

If Gilroy is Mecca, "The Stinking Rose" is the holy chapel. Communion in this *aioli*-obsessed restaurant near San Francisco's North Beach consists of bread, wine and *bagna calda*, a steaming pan of baked garlic soaked in olive oil (and a touch of anchovy paste?). The preferred method to ingest the host is by intinction: Bread is broken and dunked in the garlic bath—baptized at the *allium* altar. Robust chianti is but an afterthought, garlic ice cream with mole sauce becomes a mere last light morsal.

"I don't mind driving people to the Stinking Rose," complains one cab driver, "picking them up there is the problem."

WHAT'S THAT SMELL?

"Everyone recognizes the smell of garlic," wrote French author Alexandre Dumas, "except the person who has eaten it and who has no idea why everyone turns away when he approaches." Dumas also claimed garlic was popular with French army conscripts who ate it to gain a discharge from service. Dumas was not alone in his disdain for garlic's breath. The ancient Greeks called garlic the "stinking rose," and the temple of the goddess Cybele was off limits to garlic eaters out of fear that they would stink up the sacred. Because early Romans found the smell odious, garlic was banned from the Roman Senate. In 1330 the king of Castile decreed that anyone ingesting garlic or onion was banned from court and from meeting with its members for a minimum of one month. Nonetheless, Jehovah's chosen chose garlic over manna from heaven: "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul [is] dried away: Nothing at all, beside this manna, [before] our eyes" (Numbers, 11:5-6).

IT'S THE LOVE HERB!

While early Hebrews filled the scriptures with *Allium* accolades, the Bhagavad-Gita diverted devotees from such earthly delights. "There are foods that, in our ignorance and passion, we might say seem inoffensive. But in the long run they bring on certain complications," declaims Luis González, of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. "Garlic is considered a food that stimulates. You can eat it, but as medicine... when you feel weak, garlic is rejuvenating. But if you want a calm life, it's better not to take it. Even Western doctors recognize that garlic is an aphrodisiac. If you've taken a vow of celibacy, then you might want to avoid *allium*'s provocations."

"It's not stretching the point to say garlic can be a lover's herb," notes Lynn Allison, author of *The Magic of Garlic*, "Parsley pals? It doesn't work. It's cold. Garlic is warm and sensual."

But one man's Spanish fly is another's saltpepper. After enduring repeated complaints about her breath, Allison was forced to choose between her former lover and her garlic. The choice was not that difficult. "I love garlic on everything," she says. "This man was a WASP. You know, 'Yorkshire pudding and prime rib.' Garlic was a symbol. In this case, we didn't share the same things. You can't and shouldn't have a relationship with someone who doesn't like the way you smell—your animal scent. We're not so sophisticated that we've gotten past body odors. I even like my hands to smell of garlic. It's part of the sensual experience." Allison and her husband make garlic part of every meal.

WHY REEK?

So why does garlic make you reek? Once garlic gets into your blood stream, there are only two ways out: through small blood vessels just under the skin, with aromatic emissions from the pores (garlic sweat) or through blood-gas exchange in the lungs (garlic breath).

Can you freshen up garlic breath? Eating fresh parsley or chewing on fennel seeds are recommended. Andr e Cochand, homeopath and author of *Health through Onion, Garlic and Lemon*, suggests chewing on paper (and spitting it out), followed by a lemon chaser. For those who find chewing on lemons and Safeway bags a tad gauche, Anti-garlic capsules containing parsley oil are also available, but if you've got a hot date planned with an *Allium* hater, it's probably better to abstain for at least 36 hours prior, the time it takes for garlic's broken down components to leave your blood stream.

IT'S THE HEALING HERB!

While there is "odorless" garlic, it may well be the potent smell of diallyl disulfide that makes garlic the best thing since Marcus Welby. Some home remedies prescribe a dozen or so raw cloves a day. A Tibetan recipe requires distilled essence of garlic. The patient is instructed to crush the garlic to a pulp, mix it with white lightning and let it sit for some weeks in a cold place. Strain it, collect the essential drops into a small vial. Take at least one drop a day, gradually upping the dosage. Proponents claim this cures all ills and restores your sense of well-being.

If garlic is the panacea people claim it to be, does the Food and Drug Administration recognize its curative powers? Not according to Michael Castleman in his article titled "Legalize it!" published in *Mother Jones*. Castleman claims the FDA knows little about medicinal herbs and is unwilling to put garlic in both the "food" and "drug" categories. If it isn't considered a drug, then you can't make medicinal claims on the packaging. Thus, while in some countries, garlic-based pharmaceuticals are sold over the counter, and while garlic has been shown to dramatically reduce cholesterol, clogged American arteries must resort to costly

anti-cholesterol drugs.

Mother Jones is not the only publication to carry garlic's torch. *Delicious!* magazine touts garlic as one of the ten best-researched herbs: "If we were to design a drug that had perfect properties according to what we know about heart disease and associated risk factors, we couldn't improve on garlic."

Garlic is claimed to cure or ameliorate an ending litany of ills, including antibiotic-resistant organisms, numerous cancers and AIDS. According to Cochand, garlic—when eaten raw—will help with alcoholism, anemia, heart murmurs, arthritis, bronchitis, corns, cholera, diabetes, scurvy, intestinal disorders, hemorrhoids, stress, lack of appetite, laryngitis, leprosy, nearsightedness, burns, coughs, urinary disorders and hepatitis.

If you are a disbeliever, if you cower from garlic like Bela Lugosi on a field trip to the Vatican, you probably haven't read this far. At this point we're preaching to the choir, and brothers and sisters, it's time to sanctify your souls and wash away your sins in the breath of fresh garlic. Genuflect before the sacred bulb. Let the world hear that you've found the one way, the real truth. Know that you're not alone: "I can't make any claims, but I think we all know," says Walter McBride, owner of Garlic Survival Company in San Francisco, "Tastes great. Less filling. It's good for you ...and have a garlickious day."

ALLIUM IN THE FAMILY

It's an herb. It's chives. No jive, it's an *allium*, one of 500 to 800 pungent vegetal relatives; only a few of which are eaten.

There's a certain something about genus *allium*—an aroma caused by thiosulfinate compounds that give *allium* its distinctive aroma and its proven ability to combat cancer.

Unlike its cousin garlic, *Allium porrum L.* (otherwise known as the leek) was revered by the Romans. Pliny noted that even Emperor Nero was fond of leeks. The flavor of this plant is more subtle than its relations, making it a great dish braised alone or in leek and potato soup. The Welsh adopted the leek as a national herb of sorts during their struggle for independence (leek's green and white colors mirror those displayed by ancestral Welsh families). The leek is not an onion. So called "elephant garlic" is not a garlic, but a leek—different subspecies. The confusion is that these plants both produce immense, cloven, garlic-tasting bulbs.

Allium cepa, a.k.a. the shallot, is another mild onion relative used primarily in European cuisines. Supposedly, shallot bulbs were among the loot brought back to Europe from ancient Palestine in the 12th century Crusades. When leaves of the shallot are judiciously sheared during the growing season they are called scallions.

While most of us are familiar with onions as food, ornamental onion and garlic plants are not so well known. These pompon-like flowers are a gardener's friend—easy to grow, tasty and beautiful. *Allium* flowers can be found in a rainbow of hues including magenta, mauve and rose as well as shades of purple-blues, like lavender and periwinkle. And *Allium*'s sulfurous odor discourages most pests, including four legged pets who think twice before trampling an *allium* patch once the first stems are broken.

Some farmer's market vendors sell *Allium* flowers. Too, as one gardening guide notes, many species of decorative *allium* propagate like crazy by "promiscuous self-sowing." So, sow as you will or gobble what you won't. And remember, every family has its share of sweet and strange relations, even garlic.

—Linda Dailey Paulson

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