Something old, something new, a mantra for wedding planners, can be applied to something else this June. Farmers’ markets are proliferating across the country as more and more people eschew chain supermarkets in favor of chewing on something closer to home. Here in Central Pa we are lucky to have farmers’ market options on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, from the 130 year old Bellefonte market to the fledgling first season Village Green Market in Julian.

Friends Ann Wilken and Barbara Anderson brainstormed the project last February, when they heard about the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture grant available to support new and existing farmers’ markets. “Our goal was to get as many local people together as possible,” said Wilken.

In May there was a kick-off dinner for the new Village Green Market supported in part by a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and sponsored by the Huston Township Park and Recreation Authority. More than a hundred folks turned out for the community dinner that featured local resident Edwina Phelps playing piano tunes, followed by her students Melanie Bytheway and Rose Cowan who played during the event.

Showcasing foods of the area, especially the composted fields of the bio-and gastro-educational Julian Woods Community, the menu reflected the finest of the season—wild foods like stinging nettles and young burdock, local pork sausage from Reese’s Market in Port Matilda, fresh green salad, homemade bread, lasagna both with and without local ground beef, and a cake ribboned with a Mountainhome Farm blueberry swirl and topped with a dab of Tait Farm’s new hot seller, Chocolate Raspberry Sauce. Way Fruit Farm provided apples and Meyer’s Dairy products featured prominently. Pride of ownership was evident in the carefully crafted cards that identified the provider or source for each dish.

And that was just the kick off dinner, at a time of year with not a lot of local food options. Imagine the harvest potluck! Between start of the season and end of the season lies the time to grow, not just vegetables and fruits, but “market legs.” Community support will determine the outcome of the new initiative. If people come out and buy the local vegetables, fruits, meats and other goods that their neighbors produce, the word will get out and more vendors will have more products for sale.

Village Green Market is off to a slow start, with just one market a month on the first Saturday of the month—July 5, August 2, September 6 and October 4 from 10 am to 2 pm at the Julian Community Center. Their first market in June was pleasantly laid back and several vendors participated with few wares. But the two markets in July and August will be the litmus test.

Can the region support another farmers market? Deb Fisher of Deb’s Flowers, a longtime participant in the State College Friday market, thinks so. “It is a great opportunity for those of us that live in the rural area to meet our neighbors. We have the chance to connect with each other and to build community.”

June is the wedding month, the time of commitment. Commit to eating locally and these locavore options will multiply like rabbits.

*Deb Fisher, from Julian Woods, is a naturalist who leads local wild foods walks and helps John Mangan run the Turtle Lane Café, where they host local dinners for special occasions. Here is one of her recipes for burdock stem that is an old Italian favorite. Deb, who is as slim as a reed, baked her cardunes for the kick-off dinner. Alternately, they can be sautéed in olive oil for additional crispiness, flavor, and calories.*

*Cardunes are the flower and leaf stalks of burdock, a common “weed” or “volunteer” in the garden. A biennial thistle in the genus Arctium, burdock flowers the second year.*

Cardunes (car-doonies)

Makes 4 servings

2 large stems of young burdock

one cup flour

salt and pepper

2 eggs, beaten

one cup bread crumbs

Olive oil

Grated Locatelli or Parmesan cheese

Marinara Sauce (optional)

Cut the leaf stems from the plant. Remove the leaves. Peel away any tough strands as you trim the stem. Cut each stem into 1-2 inch pieces and steam for a few minutes until tender and then drain off the water and blot dry.

Place the flour in a shallow dish or cake pan and season with salt and pepper. Pour the beaten egg into another shallow dish for dipping. Place the bread crumbs into a third cake pan or shallow dish. Oil a baking sheet lightly or heat a thin layer of cooking olive oil in a frying pan. Preheat the oven to 350°F if you are going to bake them or just to 200°F if you plan to sauté them and keep them warm on a baking tray lined with paper towels while you sauté them all.

Dip each piece of burdock into seasoned flour, beaten egg, and breadcrumbs. Bake for 10 minutes and turn them over and bake for another 10 minutes, until golden brown on each side. If sautéing, place in hot oil and cook in batches until the crumbs are crisp and brown. Keep warm until serving time.

Sprinkle with grated cheese and serve with your favorite Marinara or pasta sauce.