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The herbal gourmet

Author launches new cookbook at seventh annual Lavender Festival

By **Maryanne Kocis MacLeod**
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Each year at the Michigan Lavender Festival, founder Jen Vasich's lavender lemon shortbread inevitably sells out.

This year, shortbread enthusiasts — and lovers of all delicately nuanced cuisine — will be offered a fallback.

Vasich is signing pre-released copies of her latest compendium, "The Lavender Gourmet"

(Moose Run Productions, \$19.95), Friday and Saturday at the festival's new home, Wolcott Mill Metro Park in Ray Township.

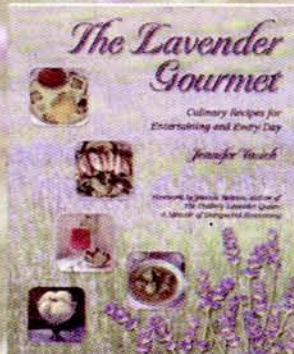
"Even if you don't like lavender, you still need this book. The recipes are still fabulous if you leave the lavender out," said Vasich, owner of Gabriel's Garden in Romeo. "They're easy to make and very solid: everybody loves them."

Vasich had been tossing around the idea of a cookbook when Nancy Feldbush, publisher for Clinton Township-based Moose Run Productions, asked her about putting one together last December.

Though she and her mom and sisters have been affectionately dubbed the "pantry chefs," for their uncanny ability to whip up meals quickly and tastefully just by visiting their pantry, one of Vasich's big concerns was whether she would have enough material.

"I started writing down the 'wow!' recipes — those dishes my husband and I had taken to a dinner party and received a really great reaction from," said Vasich, whose Polish and English heritage, in combination with her husband's Italian roots, and the pair's combined love for blended, world cuisine provide the book's backbone. "Those actually make up 75 percent of the book."

Many, including the lemon lavender shortbread, were modified from family favorites.



"My siblings and I used to fight over this sour cream twist my mom made when we were kids," Vasich said with a laugh. "I wondered how it would taste rolled in vanilla lavender sugar. Now my sisters think it tastes even better."

Desserts, however, are only one of 12 categories, including beverages, breakfasts and brunches, appetizers, veggies and sides, soups and stews, breads, muffins, scones and entrees.

All in six short months.

"It was important to get this out at the festival," said Feldbush, who often put in 14-hour days to get the book ready. "We didn't want to wait a year and a half. But quality was important as well. It was a challenge, but we did it."

In addition to managing the project, serving as copy editor, layout designer and publisher, one of Feldbush's key contributions, Vasich emphasized, was through her distinction as a non-gourmet.

"I'm an amateur cook," Feldbush explained. "If I didn't understand this term or that preparation, I would say so. As a result, I think we created a book that provides a healthy compromise for the expert chef and the complete novice."

"Lavender has always been a favorite herb for both its aroma and its visual appeal," added Vasich, who will be leading related cooking demonstrations during the 2-day event. "This year, we're



Macomb Daily staff photo by Ray J. Skowronek

Jennifer Vasich, owner of Gabriel's Garden in downtown Romeo, Michigan Lavender Festival organizer and author of "The Lavender Gourmet," has been introducing Macomb County residents to the benefits of lavender for more than seven years.

highlighting the herb's more 'newly discovered' culinary aspects."

Other first-time events include a natural health area, farmers' market, wagon rides, petting farm and a mini-lecture series. More than 45 vendors and Va-

sich's ever-popular make-and-take workshops will return.

Admission is \$4 for adults and \$3 for seniors age 60 or older. Children under 12 get in free.

The festival will take place from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. July 17 and 18 at Wolcott Mill Metropark on

Wolcott Road in Ray Township. For more information and an events listing, visit www.MichLavenderFestival.com or call Gabriel's Garden at (586) 336-0418. For additional information, visit www.moose-run.com or www.metroparks.com.