

Restaurants Keeping It Real: flora: plant food + drink

By Kathy Beach, MS, NBC-HWC

Do you like to eat out? I do! Of course, cooking at home is more cost effective and can be the healthier choice, but eating out is fun, relaxing and can be a delicious culinary treat. I have to admit that I am pretty picky about the restaurants that I choose, because I will only go if I can eat real food made with the best ingredients.

I thought that I would share how I figure that out and create a list of Connecticut restaurants that are getting it right. In the coming months, I will spotlight a different restaurant in each issue. How do I vet each restaurant? I eat there, ask questions, talk to the staff, chef and owners if possible and look at their website.

The Questions to Ask

- 1. Farm to Table.** Do they source their food primarily from local farms? Is this listed on the menu or a board?
- 2. Oils.** Do they use canola, corn, sunflower, safflower, soybean, peanut or a blended oil? Will they simply use extra-virgin olive oil or avocado oil if you ask?
- 3. Animal Protein.** Do they have menu options for 100% grass-fed meat, organic or pastured chicken, wild or sustainable farm-raised fish that is carefully vetted?
- 4. Organic.** Do they have organic options on the menu at all times (an organic salad)? Are they aware of the Dirty Dozen list from The Environmental Working Group and if so do they incorporate organic options of these foods into their menus? Are they familiar with the fact that non-GMO products can contain pesticides?
- 5. Ingredients.** Do they use real ingredients and avoid high fructose corn syrup, artificial colors and preservatives?
- 6. Allergy friendly.** Are the most common allergens listed on the menu (gluten, dairy, soy)? Is the staff trained to understand allergy concerns? Are they aware of the allergens in different menu items? Do they have gluten free choices? Is the kitchen willing and able to make substitutions to accommodate a customer's allergy or health concerns?



Flora, West Hartford, CT: plant food + drink

This month I had the pleasure of interviewing Jaime Ward, one of the owners of Flora. This happens to be one of my favorite places so I was excited to take a deeper dive into “the questions”. First of all, Flora’s motto on their website is, “as vegan as you want to be” which becomes more clear when you look at the menu.



Let’s begin with sourcing. They strive to use organic and non-GMO products whenever possible. In the CT growing season, they get some produce from local farms like Young Farms in Granby, CT (they use organic practices but are not certified), and they use regional distributors the rest of the year. The produce that is organic will vary week to week but the salad greens are often organic. The chef is happy to tell you what is organic at any given time and you can order accordingly.

They use a 10% canola/olive oil blend for their salad dressings and sautéing as well as canola in the fryer. They are happy to give you extra virgin olive oil if that is your preference. In general, they avoid using artificial ingredients and preservatives.

Now for the “fauna” that they offer for the omnivores out there. The beef is 100% grass-fed and the chicken is organic and pasture-raised. The seafood includes wild panama shrimp that is 100% free of chemical additives/no phosphates or sulfites, sustainable and turtle safe and Atlantic Sapphire Salmon that are raised in a Bluehouse™ that is basically a greenhouse for fish where they can grow in ideal conditions – good for the environment, the fish and our health. Although it is a small portion of the menu, it is absolutely the highest quality animal protein that I have found at any restaurant! For a plant-strong omnivore like myself, this makes me very happy.

The training process for the servers is long and rigorous so they are experts on the menu and can speak to any allergy concerns and the kitchen is happy to make substitutions if necessary.

The menu at Flora is creative, interesting and delicious and there is truly something for everyone. The last time I was there for lunch I had the Butternut Bisque and the Gado Gado Salad (Brussels sprouts, broccoli, radish, shaved cabbage, quinoa, arugula and a spiced peanut sauce). I did not have room for dessert, but if you do when you venture to Flora, get the chocolate avocado pudding! It is amazing! Visit floraweha.net



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