

GREAT  
TASTE OF

## Ontario



# Why you should ring in the New Year with a bottle of Ontario bubbles

## Ontario sparkling wine is rising in popularity and for good reason

**T**wenty years ago, Caroline Granger made the pioneering decision to open a winery on her parents' farmland.

"There were only a couple [local sparkling wines] being made at the time," says winemaker Maggie Granger of her mom's decision. "But I think [she] knew how amazing this region was for producing sparkling wine. And the fact that those kinds of regions are really rare in the world. So, we had a really special opportunity here."

Granger's winery isn't located in the South of France or on the coast of Portugal, but somewhere that doesn't require Canadians a passport to visit: Prince Edward County. The Granger family's winery, The Grange of Prince Edward in Hillier, Ont., has one of the largest vineyards in The County. Because, surprise: Some of the best sparkling wine in the world is actually made right here in Ontario.

"Outside of Champagne, we are equal to any other region in the world in terms of producing a sparkling product," says Philip Dowell, vice-president of production at Angels Gate Winery and KEW Vineyards Estate Winery both in Beamsville, Ont.

Dowell has worked in the wine industry for 36 years and oversees winery production from what's planted in the vineyards all the way to what's bottled and put to market. He says Ontario's climate is favourable for making sparkling wine; cooler, more temperate regions ensure grapes don't ripen too quickly, which means they have lower natural sugar and higher acidity, which gives the wines their unique flavours.

"The other primary factor is that we have limestone base underneath our soils," explains Darryl MacMillan, a sales manager for Pelee Island Winery in Kingsville, Ont. "From an alkalinity and acidity point of view, [it] adds character to the sparkling wines that are more conducive for flavour."

And if you feel like everyone you know has been talking about—and drinking—sparkling wine lately, you're not wrong. Over the past 10 years, MacMillan says, there's been an uptick in popularity in the wine style around the globe and particularly in North America.

"In the earlier part of the last decade people were moving off of still wines and into other alternatives like sparkling and rosé," MacMillan says. "The two almost went hand-in-hand." But while many people initially went for rosé wines, "sparkling has really emerged in the last year or two." This popularity is due, in part, to the versatility of sparkling wine.

"There are dry wines and sweet wines, there are red, white, and rosé wines, there are some that are full body with a lot more nuance and finesse, and there are others that are highly approachable and easy to consume," MacMillan says. "I think that there's probably something for everyone in sparkling."

Granger agrees. While most people may think of sparkling wine as something that can only be consumed during special occasions (and trust us, it's great for the holidays), "in reality, it's one of the best wines to pair with so many different foods," she says, including fish, potato chips and popcorn. With its light body and great acidity, "it's a winemaker's favourite wine to pair with your meal as a center point of the enjoyment."

But the real draw for wine lovers is the cost; you get the quality of a French wine at a reasonable price.

"If you see traditional method Champagne and traditional method sparkling from Ontario or Canada, they're made the same way [and] they're aged the same way," Granger says. "So, the quality of those wines is absolutely parallel. Champagne knows that they have the prestige to ask for those price points. Because we're new producers here and we're just building a reputation, you get that wine quality but at great value."

"Thirty-five dollars isn't the cheapest wine by any means, but you can get an amazing sparkling wine in Ontario for that price point and it's made at the highest quality."

So, how do you know if you've chosen a "good" bottle of Ontario sparkling wine for the holidays? The indicator, at least according to Dowell, is pretty easy: "You drink the whole bottle."



**Pelee Island Winery**  
**LOLA Holiday 3 Bottle Gift Pack**  
\$49.95  
(\$14.95 to \$17.95 individually)

Perfect for the holiday season, this limited-edition gift pack from Pelee Island Winery features three of their popular sparkling wines: LOLA Blush Sparkling Rosé VQA, Secco Sparkling VQA and LOLA Nero Sparkling VQA, featuring hints of strawberry and blood orange flavours, green apple and pear and raspberry and plum.

**The Grange of Prince Edward**  
**County Crémant 'Citrine'**  
\$37

Made with the same technique as Champagne, County Crémant 'Citrine' is one of three products in the winery's sparkling wine series. Made from a blend of 60 per cent pinot noir and 40 per cent chardonnay, the name comes from the golden citrine colour of the wine (similar to orange wine), achieved by allowing the grape skins to stay in the blend for a few hours up to a few days. The Citrine has 24 hours of skin contact and notes of tangerine and baked apple. This wine pairs well with ceviche and penne with Sicilian pesto.

**KEW Vineyards Estate Winery**  
**2017 Rosalie**  
\$29.95

A great example of a sparkling rosé, the 2017 Rosalie is crafted from the pinot noir grape and boasts notes of ripe strawberry and raspberry as well as rhubarb and red currant. Pair this wine with grilled salmon or shrimp or desserts like berries and Manchego or Gouda cheese.



## Stay on the 'nice' list as you explore Ontario this season

Five tips for staying safe—and protecting others—as you enjoy your region

As the COVID-19 pandemic keeps us hunkered down through the chilly holiday season, we're looking on the bright side and exploring our own backyards. Road trips and staycations are going to look a bit different this year as we mask up, sanitize and hit the open road. "Travel restrictions are in place everywhere—and they may get worse before they get better," says Rebecca Mackenzie, president and CEO of the Culinary Tourism Alliance. "But this winter is a good time to reconnect with Ontario. We just need to make sure we do our part and stay six feet apart, whether you're in the city or the countryside."

Whether you're really into local cheese and beer or township hopping in search of the best butter tart, there's a Great Taste of Ontario passport to help you. Before you hit the road, passports in tow, make sure you follow these five tips to stay healthy—and keep others safe.

### Stay informed

Before venturing out, find out what the alert level is in your region and the public measures put in place. Take all necessary precautions to protect your health and the health of others by following physical distancing and other restrictions—and be flexible. You may need to take this trip at a later date.

### Build a COVID-19 care kit

Never leave home again without your mask, hand sanitizer, alcohol wipes and gloves. Repurpose an old cosmetic case or use a sealable plastic bag to store your COVID-19 essentials and stash it in your car, backpack or purse so you never forget what you need. Remember to keep your mask in a sealed bag separate from the rest of your items to make sure everything stays clean. And it's not a bad idea to keep extra masks in your car or luggage, just in case you misplace or break one.

### Plan in advance

This isn't the time for spontaneity—you definitely need to book your accommodations in advance, not to mention wine tastings, tours and even dinners (sometimes even if you're just doing take-out). And pack smart. Many restaurants and other tourism businesses won't be able to handle reusable materials, like water bottles, so pack a big jug of water to refill your own and bring eco-friendly utensils so as not to contribute to landfill waste.

### Research your route

Before you pack up the kids and hit the road, be sure to do more research than normal on the route you're hoping to take. Whether you're heading into wine country or Ottawa for maple taffy and ice sculptures, you'll want to check that rest stops and bathrooms you're set to pass are open.

### Pack your patience

Tourism and hospitality operators across Canada are doing all they can to remain open while complying with safety standards required to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Despite doing their best, things are a little different these days, and simple things that were quick and seamless before—like ordering a cup of coffee or ringing up a purchase—might take a bit longer now. Be patient and gracious. "We are all learning how to be better citizens," Mackenzie says. "And that takes time."





Ottawa is one sweet city! Stop at a drool-worthy doughnut shop for one-of-a-kind flavours like Lemon Ricotta and Cinnamon Toast Crunch, or perhaps a pint of small-batch Hong Kong Milk Tea ice cream and world famous gelato. But whatever you're craving, be sure to save room for the Canadian classic pastry: a BeaverTails!

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## Fishing for compliments

From riverbank to restaurant (and even online) these are the Ontarians bringing smoked sturgeon to your table

### THE SUPPLIER: Petit Brûlé

For Fabienne Côté, smoked sturgeon is like the bacon of the sea. Or, more accurately, the cured pork of the large lakes and rivers in Ontario and Quebec. "Everywhere you use bacon, you can use smoked sturgeon," says Côté, who fishes and cures the native species in St-Eugène, a tiny town on the Quebec-Ontario border, directly east of Ottawa.

When not serving the "meaty, chicken-like" fish in a carbonara or on a cracker with a beer (her favourite way to eat it), Côté is the driving force behind Petit Brûlé, a boutique smoked fish business she runs alongside her husband, Michel La Haye.

"We named it Petit Brûlé for two things," she explains, a Franco-phone lilt to her words. "It's a term used in sugar-shaking, where they would light a small fire at the end of the day for the last of the maple syrup. When we're smoking the fish, we also make a 'petit brûlé.'" And while their address in Ontario is on Concession 7, that same road is called "Petit Brûlé" when it crosses into Quebec, something Côté says "just worked out."

The hand of fate also seems to have a hand in how this business came about: Both wildlife biologists by training, Côté's husband inherited a license from an octogenarian fisherman he met while studying fish populations on the St. Lawrence. Côté, who handles the preparation of the fish for sale, learned everything she knew from Gaston and other commercial sturgeon fishers. "Now, I think I'm pretty good," she says modestly. Her secret? "Smoke with maple wood," she says. "It



**Left:** Although Petit Brûlé sells small quantities of unprocessed sturgeon, most of the company's yearly catch is transformed into higher-end products.  
**Above:** Avling, located in Toronto's Leslieville neighbourhood, is part brewery, part restaurant.  
**Right:** Buchipop kombucha and Petit Brûlé smoked sturgeon bagel sandwich makes for a perfect lunch, says Patricia Larkin, the founder of The Burrow Shop in Ottawa.

gives a sweetness to the fish."

Sturgeon—"a dinosaur fish, which looks like a cross between a shark and catfish" according to Côté—are actually an endangered species in Canada, which is why Petit Brûlé is so dedicated to sustainable fishing. (Their license is only for around 340 fish a year, which translates to about 3,000 pounds of smoked sturgeon.)

For a few weeks in June and July, and then again in September and October, they head out onto the Quebec side of St. Lawrence River on their flat-bottom, 21-foot boat, checking the nets they have left overnight for fish. "On a good day, we catch 60 sturgeon, although we usually throw around 30 back in the water because they're too big or too small," says Côté. Once caught, the fish are immediately processed, vacuum sealed and frozen. The couple smoke them on demand throughout the rest of the year for a growing roster of restaurants and stores in Ontario.

"I know our fish are ugly," she says with a laugh, "but they're tasty."

### THE RESTAURANT: Avling Kitchen & Brewery

At Avling, an urban farmhouse brewery in Leslieville, the focus is on "making that connection between farmers and the cities they feed," says owner Max Meighen. "We're always looking for ways to support and grow a circular, regenerative economy." That means stocking sustainable products—like Petit Brûlé smoked sturgeon—and looking for creative ways to reduce waste.

To that end, the former chef is working on several exciting projects right now. "I've just been to the lab we're working with to try to develop a treatment system that will allow us to use the wastewater from the brewery as irrigation for our rooftop farm," Meighen explains, before happily nattering on a pilot project they're embarking on with their pork producer, who rotates grazing fields to give the land time to rest. In fallow years, he grows grain that often goes to waste. Avling is looking to purchase it for the brewery. But the ingredients and products

on its menu are perhaps the most obvious way restaurant-goers can experience Avling's commitment to sustainability. And that's where Petit Brûlé smoked sturgeon comes in. "As a Feast On certified restaurant, we're committed to sourcing the majority of our products from Ontario," Meighen explains. "Sturgeon is not a common item to find, so the idea of local, smoked sturgeon was exciting."

At Avling, you'll usually find it served up on one of their charcuterie boards, accompanied by their house-made pickles, pates and on-site-butchered meats like guanciale or coppa. "We like to serve it unadulterated," says Meighen, "because smoked sturgeon really has all the flavour it needs, and Petit Brûlé does an excellent job of not over-smoking it."

The move, he says, is this: "Put it on one of our crackers, made from spent brewery grain, and then add a little bit of pickle, to cut through the fattiness with a little acidity." Most importantly, "don't mess around with it too much."

### THE VENDOR: The Burrow Shop

Like many developments in 2020, The Burrow Shop came about as the result of the pandemic, well, turning our world upside down. "Buchipop, our kombucha brewery, had a quick and major loss of sales very suddenly in mid-March," Patricia Larkin says of the days of total lockdown, which shuttered the stores and restaurants where the fermented drink her company makes was sold. Thinking other Ottawa-based entrepreneurs in the food space were likely dealing with the same economic cliff, the Buchipop team built The Burrow Shop in a matter of days, launching the online "farmer's market" on March 27.

Their offering has quickly grown to 600 products from 60 local vendors, one of which is smoked sturgeon from Petit Brûlé. "When you're thinking local, there aren't a lot of fish options," says Larkin, who felt like it was a big gap in their offering. As with many of the things they stock, they heard about Fabienne and her smoked fish via word-of-mouth, from two of their other vendors, Mariposa Farm and Pascale's Ice Cream. "Not only is the fish caught nearby, but it's fished by the same person who cleans it, smokes it, packages it and, often, is even making the delivery," Petit Brûlé, in short, fit The Burrow Shop's ethos of shortening supply chains "perfectly."

It also became a staple of the staff's diet. "In the early days, it was crazy hectic, and we were spending a lot of time here," remembers Larkin. "We would make our meals out of groceries in the shop, and smoked sturgeon was one of our go-to lunches." They'd serve it on top of a Kettleman's bagel smeared with cream cheese alongside pickled onions, a pile of Northern Crunch lettuce from another vendor, Field-less Farms. "Delicious!" raves Larkin. "The smoked sturgeon is so wonderful; it doesn't take much effort to whip up a great plate with it."

## Why gift cards are actually the best gifts this season

Gift cards to local spots are the best holiday present for everyone on your list: your neighbours, friends, family, your kid's teacher. (Especially your kid's teacher!)

Shawn Adler, owner and chef at The Flying Chestnut Kitchen in Eugenia, Ont., is a pro at adapting, especially during COVID-19. Located about 25 minutes from Collingwood, Adler's restaurant is unpretentious with a pre-pandemic casual-fine-dining menu that didn't translate to take-out boxes. So, he's made a pivot to totable comfort foods with the help of an outdoor wood-burning oven, grill and smoker.

His formula is simple: Fresh, local and often organic ingredients plus spirits and beers from nearby makers equals the perfect takeaway meal. Menus are scrawled in marker on sheets of paper then posted on Instagram. The lineup varies, but easily slots into categories: Fried Chicken Fridays, Smoking Saturdays and Sundays are the wildcard days that are deliciously at the mercy of Chef. It feels friendly and rustic, like grabbing dinner from a friend of a friend.

"Everyone in the industry is having to reinvent the wheel," Adler says. "You can't be set in your ways; you have to adapt." The new take-out approach, a weekly market and outdoor dining in warmer weather have helped The Flying Chestnut Kitchen survive. And gift cards promise to be another tool this winter.

Once considered a last-minute cop out, gift cards now spark hope for small businesses and local restaurants. Suddenly, they're a symbol of investment and good will, because if you value an establishment, you'll pay now and reap the rewards later. What better way to spread some cheer and break bread—distantly or virtually, of course—than by keeping it neighbourly?

Gift cards are easy shopping, too. Many restaurants and shops offer them virtually or accept e-transfer payments. A gift card doesn't expire, so they're painless to mail and offer loads of flexibility to the recipient on when and how to spend it. A gift card to a spot you love



is thoughtful and personal—and you get to introduce your friends and family to something new. To make the gesture even more warm and fuzzy, jot down your favourite dishes or menu suggestions.

At Rabbit Hole, a cocktail bar, restaurant and speakeasy nestled into a 120-year-old historic building in Ottawa, Ont., gift cards can be used for meals or drinks, but they can also be applied to new virtual events. Like The Flying Chestnut Kitchen, they've gotten creative in a bid to save their business; they now offer Zoom cocktail classes, where their mixologists offer pointers, and catered wine and cheese pairings and tastings. "We realized that quite a few people would be unable to come in and celebrate, let alone in their home with loved ones. It was clear that we needed to find new ways to connect people virtually," says general manager Ellie Dellis.

For businesses themselves, the impact of a gift card lives on long after the meal itself. Buying one contributes directly to a business's bottom line, helping them not only keep the lights on, but employ more staff and stay in the black. Plus, introducing your loved ones to a new spot will get them talking and sharing, which means local restaurants will reach a whole new roster of customers. If your list is long, buy lots of smaller gift cards. And when you hand them out, challenge the recipient to do the

same. This small act casts a net that reaches further than you may think.

That's how Patricia Thompson, vice-president of sales and marketing at King Cole Ducks—a fourth generation duck farm in Whitchurch-Stouffville—sees it, too. She and her sisters are leading the flock at the zero-waste operation and they are super focused on staying local, from stocking honey and chutneys from local vendors in their farm-fresh store to purchasing wood shavings from a nearby woodworker for nests and compost to supplying grocery stores and restaurants, including many hard-hit Asian establishments. And Thompson encourages everyone to look a little harder into how to shop local.

"Ask retailers and restaurants 'is it local?'" That helps support us, and then we can help support around the globe because we can afford to," she says. "Local isn't always the cheapest, but it's not just a job, it's our life. You are supporting families and we appreciate it."

Of course, a gift card isn't the ultimate fix, but it's a strategy that can have a hand in helping save your favourite spots. "This is when we need you the most. If you want us to survive, this is the time to put your money where your mouth is," Adler says.

It turns out, the worst part of gift card-giving is deciding who to support.



### How to help small businesses beyond gift cards

Remember, this is a marathon so your long game matters. Buying gift cards helps, but so does showing support in other ways. Here's how:

#### Word of mouth

Had a delicious meal or a great experience? Tell people, both online and in real life. Recommendations go a long way, especially when they come from people you know. Don't be shy about recommending that incredible burger joint, or texting friends the name of your favourite Indian restaurant the next time they're debating who has the greatest butter chicken.

#### Shout them out on social

You can be supportive without spending money. Social media is a powerful beast and engaging on a small business' Instagram or Facebook page will help their organic reach. Like, share and comment on their posts, and do it a lot. Tag your friends, repost stories and if you've ordered takeout, post about it and tag them.

#### Spread the love by shifting your shopping habits

A one-stop shop is tempting, but if you can do it safely, spread your dollars out. Many restaurants have scrambled to offer pantry goods. Support that. It might be a little out of the way to make an extra stop for sourdough bread from a restaurant, beans from the local coffee shop or produce from the corner store, but it's worth it. "Support the business that you want to be there after this is over," says Adler. "If you love your corner pub, you're going to have to suck it up and pay a bit more for that six-pack."

**Buy subscription services or use their virtual tools**  
So many businesses are going digital. If they offer an option to do a virtual cooking class or beer tasting, do it. And if a vineyard has a wine subscription, say yes.

#### Keep ordering take-out, and do it directly through the restaurant

Takeout is perfectly safe, but if you really want to help local restaurants, avoid using food delivery platforms. Food apps take a large percentage from restaurants, so your money goes farther if you cut out the middleman.

#### Donate your time and expertise

If you have a skill that can help a small business, they might appreciate the help. That could mean a pro bono marketing consultation, or discounted rates on web development. Better yet, you'll be helping to build a local supplier network in your community, which is good for everyone involved.



# Seven cookbooks from Ontario chefs to gift your foodie friends

From Thai food to baked goods to plant-based eats, there’s a droolworthy cookbook for every culinary interest

Cold weather and shorter days mean your food-obsessed loved ones are likely to spend more time in the kitchen, and what better way to encourage them than the gift of a new cookbook? Whether they’re hoping to master a tried-and-true sugar cookie recipe, explore plant-based eating or learn to make the perfect pork roast, we have an option for every interest—and they’re all from local chefs.



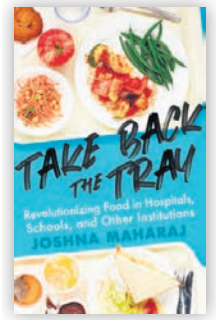
**Kiin: Recipes and Stories from Northern Thailand**  
Nait Regular, Toronto

Kiin, or “eat” in Thai, brings northern Thailand to readers’ kitchens using traditional ingredients and recipes passed down from Nait Regular’s mother. The Toronto-based executive chef teaches readers how to make everything from steamed chicken dumplings to Tom Yum paste from scratch and lifts the veil on Thai classics like mango sticky rice and beef curry. Fans of Regular’s restaurants Pai, Kiin and Khao San Road, will love her first cookbook.



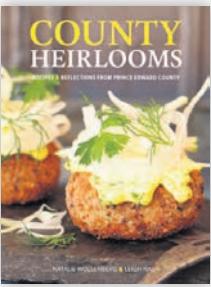
**Home Style Cookery: A Home Cookbook**  
Matty Matheson, Fort Erie

Matty Matheson is beloved for his sense of humour and chilled out, relaxed way about the kitchen. He’s back on bookshelves with 135 of his absolute favourite recipes to cook for his loved ones. Matheson takes the reader through pantry staples, hosting favourites and easy-to-make weeknight meals, making this the perfect gift for a young family or new grad.



**Baking Day with Anna Olson: Recipes to Bake Together**  
Anna Olson, Welland

If baking is more their speed, look no further than Anna Olson’s top-tier sweet and savoury recipe book. The Welland-based baker wants you to grab your child, best friend, or your significant other and try your hand at her easy-to-follow recipes. Her latest cookbook is all about the journey and time spent creating together. Of course, you get a tasty treat at the end, too.



**Take Back the Tray: Revolutionizing Food in Hospitals, Schools, and Other Institutions**  
Joshna Maharaj, Toronto

Institutional food doesn’t have to be terrible, and Maharaj shows readers how in her latest book, which is part memoir, part manifesto and part incredible cookbook. Over the past 14 years, Maharaj has brought good, healthy food to institutional kitchens. Her goal is to revolutionize institutional food, taking readers through a mouth-watering journey that shows just how delicious, nutritious and wholesome food on trays can be.

**County Heirlooms: Recipes and Reflections from Prince Edward County**  
Natalie Wollenberg and Leigh Nash, Prince Edward County

Prince Edward County is home to some of the best culinary finds in Ontario, so it’s no surprise that a new cookbook pays tribute to the region. Take a trip to Canadian wine country through stories and recipes from chefs, farmers and food producers in the area, who break down everything from growing the perfect heirloom tomatoes to cooking for a crowd. Also, royalties from the sale of this book go towards a local initiative tackling food insecurity.

**Cooking Meat: A Butcher’s Guide to Choosing, Buying, Cutting, Cooking, and Eating Meat**  
Peter Sanagan, Toronto

A chef by training and butcher by trade, Peter Sanagan’s latest cookbook dives into everything there is to know about meat. He takes readers through some of his favourite staple dishes, like fried chicken and barbecued ribs, while also demystifying processes and techniques. Covering everything from the basics of carving poultry to making your own bacon, this is a cookbook for the home cook who wants to level up their kitchen game.



**Eating Out Loud: Bold Middle Eastern Flavors for All Day, Every Day**  
Eden Grinshpan, Toronto

Eden Grinshpan offers all levels of cooks an accessible way to incorporate bright tastes and textures, all while paying tribute to her Israeli heritage. Her recipes use simple, everyday ingredients in new ways, like roasting whole heads of broccoli in yogurt or adding in-season fruits and herbs to traditional salads. Above all, Grinshpan inspires readers to get messy, creative and enjoy what you make, no holds barred.

## RESOURCE ALERT

If you’re interested in local food, you need to check out the latest edition of The Ontario Pantry by Lynn Ogryzlo. Brimming with 24 local recipes, a directory of 280 farmers and stunning photos of Ontario food and more, this e-book aims to inspire home cooks to think, buy, eat and drink local. The Ontario Pantry helps readers do just that by providing a comprehensive list of where to do your local shopping, and who to go to for your favourite farm-to-table agriculture products. Better yet, it’s free.

# Seven Ontario-made gifts we want to find under the tree

The holidays are going to look a little different this year, but that’s all the more reason to splash out on carefully considered presents for your loved ones. (And to support small businesses, for that matter!) We’ve put together a list of must-have options all made by local Ontario artisans to take the guesswork out of gifting.



**OTTERCREEK WOODWORKS**  
Black Cherry Charcuterie Board, \$125, [ottercreekwoodworks.com](http://ottercreekwoodworks.com)

This stunning charcuterie board showcases the natural beauty of our Canadian landscape. Made from cherry wood that was sourced within 50 kilometres of Otter Creek Woodworks in Tillsonburg, Ont., this handcrafted serving vessel is perfect for entertaining. Just imagine how impressive it will look packed with artisanal meats, cheeses, fruits and nuts.

**TOPSY FARMS**  
Navy Blue and Red Checkerboard Wool Blanket, \$200, [topsyfarms.com](http://topsyfarms.com)  
Gift your BFF a cozy throw—the ideal companion for movie night, an evening by the fire or curled up with a good book. Woven from unbleached Canadian wool on the shores of Amherst Island, this stylish blanket will last a lifetime, just like your friendship.



**TOP SHELF DISTILLERS**  
Canadian As Apple Pie Kit, \$58, [topshelfdistillers.com](http://topshelfdistillers.com)  
If you have a cocktail enthusiast in your life, this Canadian As Apple Pie Kit is the ultimate gift. Update their bar-cart with refreshing moonshine that’s made from locally sourced, all-natural ingredients in Perth, Ont. The kit includes a growler of their latest batch of reunion apple pie moonshine, aromatic bitters, two bottles of Fever-Tree Premium Ginger Beer plus a swanky Top Shelf Distillers tote bag.



**SOAPBLISS**  
Cold-processed handmade soap, \$6 per bar, [etsy.com/ca/shop/SoapBliss](http://etsy.com/ca/shop/SoapBliss)  
This Oakville-based small business is

known for its stocking stuffer-worthy soaps, which are free of detergents, phosphates, and sulfates and come in unique scents, including IPA beer, Muskoka Boathouse (scented with cedar, sandalwood and “a dash of spice and frankincense”), cucumber and green tea and pomegranate. There’s even an ultra-mild unscented version for babies.



**PLUCK TEAS**  
Honey Chai, \$32, [pluckteas.com](http://pluckteas.com)  
If tea is their drink of choice, be sure to pick up a delicious blend from Toronto’s Pluck Teas. Founder Jennifer Commins started the company in 2012 to improve the quality of restaurant tea—and she’s known for infusing her tea with local ingredients. We recommend this winter warmer, which is made with honey harvested by Ontario Honey Creations.



**LUVU NATURALLY**  
Lunah Life Face & Body Whip in Frankincense & Jasmine, \$30, [lupunaturally.ecwid.com](http://lupunaturally.ecwid.com)  
Remind your giftee to rest, recharge and relax with skincare from Huron

County’s LUVU Naturally. The Huron County company uses only natural and ethically sourced ingredients, and they offer products for the whole family. We love this luxe face and body cream, which contains wrinkle-fighting neem oil, scar-reducing frankincense and ultra moisturizing jasmine. If you’re feeling extra generous, consider gifting your BFF one of Huron County’s Hygge Boxes (available through <https://519tours.ca/>), which contain offerings from LUVU Naturally, as well as mittens and socks from Cranbrook Acres Alpacos, a “Lake Huron” scented candle from Olive + Rose, seasoning mix from The Garlic Box and chocolate from Sugar & Spice.



**THE SCENTED MARKET**  
Milk & Honey Soy Wax Candle, \$27, [thescentedmarket.ca](http://thescentedmarket.ca)  
When in doubt, a heavenly smelling candle is always a crowd pleaser. This one from The Scented Market in Arliss, Ont., has familiar notes of milk and honey and is hand-poured with natural soy wax that lasts 100 hours. Bonus: when finished, the jar can double as a chic piece of home décor.

# SARGENT FARMS

# FARM-FRESH CHICKEN

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# Better, together

How the power of community has helped three family-owned businesses weather 2020



When Courtney Colas reflects on 2020, the word that springs to her mind is not panic, pandemic or even pivot. “It’s patience,” she says with a wry laugh. “Everything has just taken so much longer than it should have.”

Speaking with Colas, another p-word springs to mind: positivity. Colas, you see, is standing in Creperie Verlan, the Hamilton restaurant she and her husband Mike opened—against all odds—just over a month ago.

On this cool November morning, she’s preparing for another day of serving up French classics: crepes, of course, but also croissant-and-butter pudding, rose petal-topped creme brûlées and other twists on the expected; all in a sunny, chic space designed to conjure up “the outskirts of Paris,” she says. “Not the tourist district.”

When they signed the lease in February, they expected to open in May. After the pandemic upended everything, their landlord gave them the chance to break their lease, but the couple decided to push forward.

“We’d fought so hard to find this space,” Colas explains. “The pandemic had already set us back so much, it was like, ‘Do we really want it to set us back even more?’ So, we just went for it!”

Frankly, it seems like a mini-miracle that they’re even open now—especially when you find out that, in addition to getting this place open, Colas and her husband already own another restaurant, Oakville’s Feast On-certified La Parisienne Crêperie, which they’ve had to navigate through lockdown, takeout, patio season, and now the second wave. (As if they needed another level of pressure, this is the same restaurant Mike’s parents, Parisian immigrants, had run for two decades, which the couple took over in 2015.)

Thanks to hard work, “overwhelming” support from the locals and an “amazing” team, LP (as they affectionately call the original location) has weathered the storm so far, and Colas is similarly optimistic about Verlan’s future too. Although yes, they did pivot the business model a bit, adding a “petit marché” stocked with local products (“If I use it in my cooking, it’s on those shelves,” says Colas) to work in tandem with the dining room.

“So far, it’s going well,” she says. “Everyone here in Barton Village has

been so welcoming. There’s such a strong community vibe, and it’s really about collaboration, not competition. The local support has been humbling.”

The importance of community is a theme that comes up over and over again when you ask Ontario’s smaller, family-run businesses about how they’ve handled 2020. It’s certainly been a guiding light for Sargent Farms, a poultry producer that has been in the same family since 1943.

“The Sargent family lives and breathes Milton,” explains Justin Robinson, the company’s chief marketing officer. “They live in the community, they shop in the community, their friends are in the community. When COVID hit, we just stayed true to who we are, and put the community first.”

That focus is why, when panic buying led to empty grocery shelves and competitors took the chance to price gouge, Sargent Farms decided to “serve the community first,” says Robinson. The company prioritized getting product onto their e-commerce site and into their two stores, places where their neighbours—the people of Milton, Mississauga and the surrounding area—could access it, rather than channeling their supply into the big box retailers who were clamouring for it. They also continued to donate a portion of their proceeds to grassroots causes like their local hospitals and The Darling Home for Kids, which provides respite, residential and palliative care for children with serious illnesses.

“We do these things because we’re committed to being a sustainable company, in everything that we do,” says Robinson, going on to explain that, while stewarding the planet is a Sargent Farms value, they also expand the idea of sustainability beyond the usual environmental definition. “We care about how we treat people, how we integrate into our community,” he continues, tying it all back to their raison d’être: the 100 percent natural, “old-fashioned” (in that it is minimally processed) chicken they sell right back to the community where it was processed. And that matters, says Robinson. “When you choose a Sargent chicken, or shop at another small retailer or restaurant, all the profits end up back in the local community. They don’t go into the pockets of a large corporation.”

And, in return, those small businesses do what they can to reciprocate that support. When the entire world shut down in mid-March, Mark Rickards witnessed something he’d never seen in all the years he’s been running Glenburnie Grocery, a Kingston-based purveyor of primarily local goods that’s been in his family since 1967.

“There was this panic in the customers’ eyes,” he remembers. “There was an eerie feeling that made it unpleasant to be as busy as we were.”

Rickards, who’s been “on the payroll for probably 45 years,” had actually been scaling back his involvement in the day-to-day business, but overnight, he was back to 80-hour weeks.

“We thought it was going to be for three weeks, but that turned to six months and, to be honest, and it hasn’t really backed off since,” he says. “It’s been a challenging six months, but I have a great staff, and they’re the ones who have made it still fun to come in each day.” He also credits his suppliers, who made it possible for them to have stock when shelves were bare. “We pay our bills on time, and we treat them well,” he reflects. “It helps being good to people, and when you need them, they’re good to you in return.”

And while it’s been a “win-win” year for Glenburnie Grocery’s bottom line, Rickards is acutely aware that his business’ good fortune may have come at the expense of the local restaurants who have struggled because people are choosing to stay home and cook for themselves. (Over at the meat counter, for instance, they can’t keep pork hocks or chicken bones in stock, since everyone is currently making homemade soup.)

He’s certainly not tempted to use the elevated demand to fuel expansion. Glenburnie Grocery is the sort of place where you’re greeted at the door, where you might run into a neighbour and talk for 20 minutes in the aisles, where the staff have time to special order you an item the store doesn’t usually stock. If they got bigger, they’d just be “another big box store,” says Rickards, and that’s the last thing he or his customers want.

“I just want things to go back to the way they were,” he says. “But until then, we’re going to get through this, we’ll be there for people, and somehow, we’ll all find our new normal.”

# The best gift ideas for your food-obsessed BFF (or yourself!)

We asked the experts—Pay Chen, Paul Taylor, Joshna Maharaj and Suresh Doss—for their best recommendations

Holiday shopping for the foodie in your life can be tricky business. You never know what they already have in their pantry, or what high-tech kitchen tools they’ve had their eyes on all year long. But finding something unique — maybe even bespoke or locally-made! — is a sure-fire way to impress them. So, we asked food experts for some shopping advice. Here’s what they said.



**Pay Chen**  
food writer and host of the *Here's the Scoop* podcast

For acclaimed foodie Pay Chen, Christmas is a chance to get her friends and family hooked on the same delicious products she’s been loving all year long. The product at the top of her list right now is Wabanaki maple syrup, a delicious Canadian staple made on Tobique First Nation. “The mini three-pack is a great sampler of (each) maple syrup and already packaged as a perfect gift,” Chen says. She also recommends the sweet honey products from Ontario Honey Creations, and anything from Soma Chocolate, a Toronto-based company that creates world-renowned chocolates and truffles.



**Paul Taylor**  
executive director, FoodShare Toronto

FoodShare Toronto’s executive director Paul Taylor knows the holidays are going to be different this year. “This is a time when a lot of folks come together with friends, family and co-workers and build memories around good food. We’re missing much of that communal spirit this year and trying to recreate it in different ways,” he says. “At the same time, we know that it’s also a time when a lot of our friends and neighbours are struggling with access to food.” That’s why the food justice organization has come up with a way to help with both of those challenges—and Taylor says it makes for a great holiday gift. They’ve partnered with Drake Commissary to sell gift baskets containing locally sourced treats—including Reunion Island coffee, dark maple syrup and Cinnamon Toast Crunch-flavoured popcorn—to raise funds for their work. “You’re going to love it, the person who receives it is going to love it and we’re grateful for your contribution to this important work,” Taylor says. “Really, is there a better gift than good food that supports local businesses and at the same time helps put food on the table in communities hardest hit by the pandemic?”



**Joshna Maharaj**  
chef and activist

As a rule, chef Joshna Maharaj prefers to give the gift of “consumable gifts with minimal packaging” during the holidays. This year, she’s been big into preserving. “I’ve gone deep on making drink shrubs this year, and hit the jackpot with my cranberry version,” she says.

Shrubs are concentrated syrups made from fruit, sugar, and vinegar. Maharaj makes hers with fresh cranberries from Johnston’s, a Feast On-certified cranberry farm in Muskoka, Osprey Bluffs honey and empire apple vinegar. She recommends serving them with sparkling water or warmed with a shot of your preferred alcohol. If you would rather bake, Maharaj suggests whole grain shortbread made with local grains. “This year I’ll use a rye flour from CIPM grains in Peterborough, some of that gorgeous Stirling cultured butter and Forbes’ maple syrup,” she says. Or, consider gifting a homemade pickle. Maharaj says pickled garlic scapes are “a wonderful addition to a holiday charcuterie board,” but carrots, radishes or tomatillos make great preserves, too.



**Suresh Doss**  
food writer

Kitchen tools are a foodie’s best friend, according to Toronto-based food writer Suresh Doss, and the ultimate kitchen tool is a well-made knife. It’s “the best gift you can give any aspiring or seasoned home cook,” Doss says. “Working with a good knife can be an empowering experience... [because it gives] you heightened confidence to slice and dice as you prep your favourite dishes.” He recommends any of the products at Knife Toronto for their quality and elegance. While you’re at it, consider giving the gift of new kitchenware. Doss endorses the homemade products at Chic and Basta for their refined “restaurant” appeal. Doss will also be taking any opportunity to gift the chile crisps from Zing to friends and family. Their products are “superbly aromatic from the moment you open the jar,” he says.

# If ever there was a winter to embrace Hygge, it’s this one

We’ll all be spending more time at home this season, so here’s how you can bring some locally-sourced, Scandinavian inspired coziness to your day-to-day



Remember a couple of years back, when the lifestyle scene was consumed with Hygge (pronounced hue-gah), a Danish concept of coziness that’s closely associated with blankets, good books and tea? Well, if ever there were a time to embrace that approach again, it’s now.

There’s no literal English translation, but Hygge is a heart-warming Scandinavian way of life that prioritizes enjoying the simple things in life, from a great cup of tea to, yes, a warm pair of wool socks. It’s exactly the kind of comforting approach we’ll need when temperatures drop and the days get shorter—and several regions in Ontario are making it easy.

Huron County is encouraging people to make Hygge a part of their lifestyles this winter with an entire cozy campaign, including virtual crafting classes and promos with local inns and B&Bs who have Hygge experiences on offer. They’ve even put together a “Hygge box” stocked with everything you’ll need to get your Hygge on at home, all stocked from local businesses of course.

It contains super soft mittens and socks from Cranbrook Acres Alpacos, a soy candle from Olive + Rose (in “Lake Huron” scent, event), soothing skincare from Luvu Naturally, seasoning mix from The Garlic Box and, most importantly, chocolate from Sugar & Spice.

We often think of Hygge in terms of making our homes warm and welcoming, but appreciating nature is another big part of this lifestyle—and there are plenty of ways to enjoy Ontario’s wintery wonderland this season. Head to Harley Farms in Keene, Ont. to check out their cross-country skating trail, where you can take a leisurely, two-kilometre skate through the farm’s fields and woodlands. Or try your hand at snowshoeing at Snow Valley in Barrie, Ont. There are 17 kilometres of trails, including several intended for beginner snowshoers.

But our favourite element of Hygge is its focus on comfort food and Bloomfield’s Flame + Smith, a Feast On-certified restaurant devoted to cooking over the fire, certainly fits the bill. Try their wood-fired Wolfe Island mushroom salad, Icelandic cod, or wood-fired cauliflower steak—and if you’re feeling extra Scandi, maybe you can enjoy your meal on their outdoor patio, weather-permitting. Or, experience Bistro ‘67’s devotion to the “field to fork.” Another Feast On-certified spot, this teaching-inspired restaurant in the Centre for Food at Durham College’s Whitby campus is currently offering meal kits, dinner specials and family-style meals for curbside pickup. Try the confit, two King Cole duck legs served on white bean and tomato ragout, or a two-person charcuterie board featuring local cheese and meats, condiments, sourdough crostini, seasonal fruit and nuts.

And think about how you can bring Hygge home in other ways, too. Here are three tips to help you live a Hygge life:

**Bring the outdoors in**  
Create a Hygge environment at home by adding elements of nature. Think twigs, wooden décor items and quite literally anything you’d find in a forest, including plants and flora. Even scents with soothing notes of pine or spruce will do.

**Take a Fika**  
Fika is the Swedish word for “coffee break,” and it’s at the heart of Hygge. It traditionally means taking time to pour a delicious cup of joe

accompanied by something sweet, like a freshly prepared cinnamon bun. The act encourages us to take pause, connect with one another and focus on being present—no need to rush.

**Let it snow**  
Hygge is usually solitary, but that doesn’t mean you can’t socialize. Get outside and take in the surroundings of nature with a small (and socially distanced) group of family or friends. Spending time with the people you enjoy while out for a brisk walk or snowshoe is a sure-fire way to feel connected to both the outdoors and your nearest and dearest.

 **FoodShare**

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BUNDLING UP  FOR SOME

*festive family time*

IS A NICE WAY TO ENJOY THIS

*holiday season* 



WHETHER YOUR PATH IS PAVED

OR COVERED IN ICE



OR SNOW,



BE SURE TO WARM UP



WITH SOME

*local goodness,*

AND BY ALL MEANS, BRING A TASTE HOME.



WHEN YOU PICK UP

*something delicious*

AT FINE PURVEYORS OF FOOD



AND DRINK,



YOU DO SOMETHING

*special* FOR *everyone* IN THE COMMUNITY.

AND RIGHT NOW, THAT MEANS

*more than ever.* 



*happy holidays*

STAY SAFE. STAY CLOSE TO HOME.



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