Bucolic Powisset Farm, which has developed a strong Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and on-site farm stand, now offers year-round culinary workshops.

The goal, says education and outreach coordinator Rachel Kaplan, “is to get people who love food and farming to join us in the kitchen and out in the fields”—even during the soggy springtime—“to learn how produce is grown and how to prepare it in easy and delicious ways.” Kaplan teaches many of the classes, including cheese-making, fermentation, and a “Field-to-Lunchbox” series for families, and sees her role as “creating new relationships with food.” “I am not going to be standing there, Martha Stewart-style, showing how it’s done,” she adds. “These workshops are all hands-on, with recipes that are totally doable at home.”

The farm sits on nearly 108 acres in Dover, Massachusetts, that have supported crops and livestock, along with former timber and coal operations, for centuries. The land is now owned by The Trustees of Reservations, a nonprofit conservation organization that holds more than 125 properties throughout the state. Powisset Farm (from which visitors can walk or bike to another Trustees’ site, Noanet Woodlands) was opened as reservation and a working farm, with easy walking trails throughout, in 2008.

About 15 acres are planted with vegetables, fruits, flowers, and herbs—for the 400-member summer CSA and its 150-member winter counterpart, explains Kaplan. The close to 175,000 pounds of vegetables harvested go to members, the farm stand, and to five local hunger-relief groups. In addition, “We have two mama pigs and raise 12 or so piglets in the spring each year,” she says; their meat is sold at the stand in the fall, while eggs from the farm’s 100 hens are available all year.

The “Powisset Cooks!” series seemed a natural next step. “What better opportunity,” Kaplan asks, “not only to come support a farm and see a beautiful landscape,
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but to take your learning to a new level by engaging with food and people outside of your own kitchen?” The farm’s historic barn was renovated last spring to create a communal kitchen and open classroom. Workshops began last August and have emphasized rustic fare and simple techniques—sometimes under the tutelage of guest chefs.

This spring’s series includes: “Baking Bread with Local Grains” (March 10); “Field to Lunchbox: Creative Solutions for Lunchbox Boredom” (March 15); “Eggstravaganza!” (April 2); cheese-making (April 4); and “Farm-tastic Desserts” (May 7). Families may also enjoy “InstaFarm!"
an afternoon of snapping photos at Powisset (April 12), or a “Behind the Scenes” look at what volunteers and staff do to prepare for planting the crops (April 23). “Even for those who are coming in the cold,” Kaplan notes, “we like to take excursions around the farm, to see what’s happening there, and see what’s been started in the greenhouse.” (All classes and events are open to both members and non-members of the Trustees, are limited to 12 people, and tend to fill up fast. To register, contact Kaplan at rkaplan@ttor.org, or call 508-785-0339, ext. 3003.)

During classes, participants line up along the long tables to chop, mix, and pound (in the case of cabbage en route to a new life as kimchee), talking and learning as they go. The farm arranges private cooking classes as well, and Kaplan plans to bring in professional chefs for demonstrations and start organizing “Farm Dinners” featuring food grown at Powisset and other CSAs and farms operated by the Trustees. These include Appleton Farms, on the North Shore in Ipswich, which sells fresh dairy products and meat at its own store and also offers cooking classes. (For a full list of the Trustees’ farms, visit www.thetrustees.org/places-to-visit/csa.)

Powisset is also a beautiful place simply to walk around, especially with young children. Trails loop throughout the property, and visiting (but not feeding) the pigs and chickens is encouraged. Those who want a more vigorous outing can venture less than a half-mile away, practically across the street, into the Noanet Woodlands. This property offers more than 17 miles of trails (from easy to strenuous) that are open to walkers and mountain bikers (after the trails dry). Moreover, a trail spur links to the adjacent Hale Reservation, a 1,200-acre preserve. Take a couple of hours off from the daily grind, or spend all day, any day, from dawn to dusk, exploring these pastoral and wooded landscapes typical of central New England. The properties are a 35-minute drive (or 90 minutes by public transportation) from Boston. “We want to connect people to the farms,” Kaplan says, “and all of the special places that are right here.”

CURiosities: Irish Pictures

This year’s Irish Film Festival at the Somerville Theatre features Gold, about an estranged father who returns to his family and nearly wrecks all of their lives. It’s a roaring good comedy, at least to many Irish moviegoers and others who enjoy the country’s traditional brew of offbeat, dark, or piercing works. “When you’re done with your shamrocks and shillelaghs,” suggests festival director Dawn Morrissey, “come see the real Ireland.” Held March 19-22 in Davis Square, the festival offers about 45 titles, including two Oscar nominees: An Bronntanas, a thriller, and Baogaloo and Graham, a short from Northern Ireland. (In the latter, children also grapple with parents’ life choices that here threaten baby chicks that two young brothers have vowed to keep and raise themselves.) The volunteer-run festival is in its fifteenth year, and gives out awards, such as best “Global Vision Documentary,” thus some of the directors and actors are also on hand and gladly discuss their work. Musicals, or movies that showcase Irish music, are always on the program, too, typically as the grand finale on Sunday afternoon that’s followed by a reception at The Burren, a traditional Irish pub down the street. Upward of 3,000 people turn out for the four-day event, many of them Irish-born, or close to it. “We have parties after the shows every night, open to everyone,” says Morrissey, who is from County Kildare; most patrons don’t wait until Sunday “to go out for the craic, or a hooley.” That was especially evident last year when the charming and poignant documentary, The Irish Pub, was paired with Handing Down The Tunes, about the late, legendary musician Tommy McCarthy (whose son, Tommy McCarthy Jr., owns The Burren). Celebrants leaving the shows soon brought Davis Square the closest it may ever come to Dublin.

Pownsett Farm and Noanet Woodlands
Dover, Massachusetts
http://www.thetrustees.org/places-to-visit/csa/powisset-farm-csa/
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