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How to Eat (and Read) Close to Home



Rick Sabelli Jr. for The New York Times

NICE NEWS Tracey Ryder, left, and Carole Topalian, founders of Edible Communities, in Santa Fe.

By [MARIAN BURROS](#)
Published: August 29, 2007

NO one would ever mistake Edible Brooklyn for Edible Atlanta, though both are quarterly food magazines that share a corporate parent and a typeface. But the story titles in the latest issue of the Brooklyn version might flummox Atlantans. There is, for example, “Fresh Kills,” about a live poultry market in Williamsburg, and “Late Night Nosh,” which is self-explanatory, at least in New York City.



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

MORE ON THE WAY The Edible magazines, about cities or regions, are a growing franchise.

Meanwhile Edible Atlanta provides its readers with recipes for corn pudding and ways to cook kudzu, the bedeviling weed that has taken over the South. That story begins with a joke:

“How do you plant kudzu? You throw it and run.”

That line probably won’t play in Bay Ridge. But do Atlantans know that kudzu, free for the taking, can be substituted for grape leaves, kale or spinach? Or that you can make jelly from kudzu blossoms?

What began five years ago as one publication that tried to tell the citizens of Ojai, Calif., everything they ever wanted to know about the food and wine in their community has turned into a network of 33 Edible magazines across the country. Each of them offers readers culinary news tailored to where they live.

The company is spreading like kudzu, maybe faster. Seven more magazines are coming by the end of the fall, from Aspen to San Diego, not to mention Toronto. Negotiations for 12 others next year are in the works.

Tracey Ryder, who, with her business and life partner, Carole Topalian, started Edible Ojai and owns the umbrella organization, Edible Communities, thinks they have been lucky in their timing. “We call it the new mainstream: people caring so much more about where food comes from,” she said. “There is a grand scheme about local foods, but we really want the specific flavor of each

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community.”

The goal of the magazines is to help create the kind of community where local is, if not king, at least an heir to the throne. It’s a place where small farmers can make a living practicing sustainable agriculture; where the environment is everyone’s concern and locally grown and locally made food is readily available. Better still, the magazines are free at some restaurants and food stores, though paid subscriptions are available.

The business model, in which local publishers pay a franchising fee in exchange for the title and some editorial support, is not unique. In fact, tailoring a single prototype to multiple cities or regions is an increasingly popular publishing format, adopted by magazines focused on weddings, society and restaurant menus.

“What publishers have discovered is that franchising a title that succeeds in one place is much simpler than producing a national magazine,” said Samir Husni, chairman of the journalism department at the [University of Mississippi](#), who studies magazine publishing.

Mr. Husni traces the success of these niche publications to readers’ increased interest since Sept. 11 in what is going on in their own backyards. “Everyone wants their own little cocoon of feel-good,” he said. “We live in a society I refer to as isolated connectivity, and here come those tiny little publications in your own little town, and they connect you on a first-name basis.”

The magazines are deliberately upbeat. “Our goal is to entertain and inform, and this magazine is a way for people to have fun exploring the local food scene,” said Marla Camp, editor and publisher of Edible Austin. “We don’t want to be telling people what to do. We want to give them the ability to act if they care to.”

Some of the magazines dive into political issues, like farmed fish, plastic water bottles and land preservation. Many have articles that are of broad interest, certain to make their way to the national press. A recent one in Edible Santa Fe discussed the next hurdle for the eat-local movement: how to get food from medium-size farms to stores.

A few of the magazines, like Edible Brooklyn and Edible San Francisco, reflect both the region and the experience of the publishers. The articles in Edible San Francisco include some very good food writing, including one particularly evocative piece about strawberries, with the advice that if you insist on washing them, do so in champagne.

Others, like Edible Shasta-Butte, covering the far north of California, offer more practical information, including a delightful look at the neglected elderberry, while Edible Boston writes about efforts to grow huitlacoche, the deliciously edible corn fungus, in Massachusetts. Some magazines have many more recipes than others, not all of them tested.

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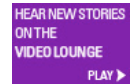
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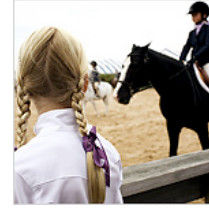


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