

**HOME PLATE: New onion peels away pucker and tears**

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By Janice Denham

Life as an onion can be thankless. People curl up their noses at the smell, cry when they come close and may not feel like socializing after they've been in touch.

Schnuck Markets and Monsanto Co. now offer a sweet, exclusive answer to the dilemma.

Produce sections of the local market chain provide the sole home to the new EverMild onion, bred and grown in the Pacific Northwest. It claims a role as the only U.S.-grown sweet onion for winter plates.

At a tasting lunch at the Schnucks Cooks Cooking School in Des Peres, Mo., last week, company Vice President of Produce and Floral Mike O'Brien called himself a "big fan" of sweet onions.

"I like to microwave them with butter, seasoning and garlic. They taste like butter," he said appreciatively.

O'Brien explained that sweet onions usually come from Mexico and Peru this time of year.

"We always try to buy domestic," he said. "There hasn't been a choice in the past. This year we won't have to do that."

David Stark, Monsanto's vice president of consumer traits, explained that the new EverMild onion has been in the works for more than a decade as part of the company's goal to produce healthy, tasty foods. The vegetable seed was developed through traditional plant breeding. A Washington grower is selling his 700,000-pound onion crop, stored since its harvest in August and September.

O'Brien said Schnucks will carry some varieties from outside the U.S. at the same time. OsoSweet is often seen in this winter market, as are year-round red/purple onions. SuperSweet and 1015 varieties



arrive from Texas in March, with Vidalias, the grand squire of the sweets, coming into markets right behind them. Summer's Walla Walla grow in Washington, too.

Cooking school chef Lucy Schnuck flavored French Onion Soup with white wine and sherry. After slicing the new mild onions, she added only a "pinch" of sugar to encourage them to caramelize.

"I never cried. To me, it's like a shallot," she said.

Nate Bonner, another Schnucks chef, agreed. They topped a salad of greens, beets and blue cheese with fresh rings. He grilled onions and poblano peppers and used the resulting salsa as a bed for grilled dry-aged beef steak.

Grated onion went into citrus sorbet, which they suggested as a palate-cleanser between courses.

O'Brien expected the price, plus the quality and flavor, would appeal to Schnucks customers. Stark, of Monsanto, said the selling season seems like a good fit, but can be adjusted to match the market for the onion grown in low-sulfur soil for sweetness.

Stark said more seed varieties for common vegetables and fruits will come from Monsanto in the near future. Public Affairs Manager Danielle Stuart said melons, tomatoes and a lettuce twist between iceberg and romaine could grow into the company's next products.

The Schnucks chefs adapted this EverMild pizza recipe.

#### SWEET ONION, MUSHROOM AND GREENS PIZZA

3 tbsp. butter

1 bunch spinach, washed, stems removed

Salt and pepper

1 cup mushrooms, sliced (oyster, trumpet, portobella, crimini and shiitake mushrooms as desired)

4 to 8 oz. goat cheese

4 EverMild onions, halved, sliced

Pizza dough (see Note)

Extra-virgin olive oil

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

In large skillet over medium-high heat, melt some of the butter. Cook greens, turning and seasoning with salt and pepper to taste, about 5 minutes until wilted. Remove and let drain. Squeeze out excess liquid and chop roughly.

In same pan, melt remaining butter. Cook mushrooms, stirring occasionally, 7 to 10 minutes until tender and juices have evaporated.

Prepare pizza dough. Arrange wilted spinach, mushrooms, cheese and onion on top. Drizzle with a little olive oil.

Bake in preheated oven 7 to 10 minutes until crust is golden and crispy.

Note: Dough was made with recipe for new Fleischmann's pizza yeast, using truffle oil. If using other oil, cook a few cloves of garlic, chopped, with mushrooms.

#### Sweet onion 101

- Use on sandwiches, salads, lightly-cooked dishes
- Choose onions free of cuts and bruises
- Store in single layer in well-ventilated, cool, dry location
- Use a sharp knife to cut off top first, peel down toward root, trim root last to avoid releasing irritants

For more information, visit [evermild.com](http://evermild.com) or [onions-usa.org](http://onions-usa.org)