

Savoring Plant-Based Eating with Chefs Tia and Matthew Raiford

Summary

Is there a better time to enjoy plant-based eating than when summer transitions to autumn, as gardens and farmers' markets overflow with gorgeous fresh vegetables and fruits? In this cooking demonstration, chefs Tia and Matthew Raiford of Gilliard Farms in Brunswick, Georgia, join Drawdown Georgia's Lisa Lilienthal to prepare a Plant-Forward Coastal Paella and a Hoja Santa Salad, sharing their approach to plant-based eating, reducing food waste, and cooking with what the farm provides.

Key Takeaways

- Matthew's coastal paella swaps the traditional pound and a half of sausage, clams, and shrimp for mushrooms, butternut squash, carrots, onions, and peppers, showing how a familiar recipe can go plant-forward without losing its heart.
- The Raifords treat vegetable scraps as a three-part resource: first for eating, then simmered into vegetable stock, and finally composted, breaking down twice as fast once already cooked.
- Their advice for anyone new to plant-based eating: it's not all or nothing, buy produce that comes in bunches rather than bags, keep fresh vegetables visible in the fridge instead of buried in the back, and don't be afraid to swap in what's locally available and in season.
- Gilliard Farms has been in Matthew's family since his great-great-great-grandfather, Jupiter Gilliard, purchased it in 1874, and Tia discovered, just two weeks after marrying Matthew, that her own great-great-grandfather was born in the very same Georgia county.
- Matthew's cookbook, *Bress 'n' Nyam*, meaning "bless and eat" in Gullah Geechee, opens with an entirely plant-forward first chapter, challenging the assumption that Gullah Geechee cuisine is meat-centered.

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Lisa Lilienthal: All right, we're gonna get started. Welcome, everyone, to the latest Drawdown Georgia webinar. This particular climate solution we're talking about today, plant-based eating, is one of my personal favorites, and the fact that you're here means it must hold some interest for you as well. I'm Lisa Lilienthal, I work with the Drawdown Georgia communications team, and I'm so excited to welcome you today, especially now, as the summer winds down and our gardens and farmers markets are overflowing with gorgeous fresh vegetables and fruits. It just makes sense to slow down for a minute and enjoy it. And the best thing about plant-based eating as a climate solution is that it doesn't limit us only to plants — it only encourages us to do our best to make things from the garden, the orchards, and the fields more prominent in our diets.

It's my pleasure now to introduce our chef farmers, coming to us from the kitchen of their farm right outside of Brunswick, Georgia. Those of you who've been with us for a long time may remember that Matthew Raiford was with us at our launch in 2020. A descendant of the

freshwater Gullah Geechee of coastal Georgia, Matthew grew up on land that has sustained his family for seven generations. Gilliard Farms was purchased by his great-great-great-grandfather, Jupiter Gilliard, in 1874, and is now in the hands of the sixth generation farmer — that's so amazing. His wife, Tia, was born in Albany, New York, raised in Connecticut, and grew up the daughter of a musician, somewhat disconnected from the heart of the 120-acre watermelon farm of her grandparents and ancestors, who were from Alabama but had moved north during the Great Migration. Matthew and Tia are both graduates of the Culinary Institute of America, and between them they have lots of accolades as well as beautiful shared experiences — they're also owners of Strong Roots 9, a lifestyle brand through which they create products and experiences to help us reconnect with our natural heritage, from the perspective of the people whose ancestors actually built it.

I'm gonna pass the mic to Matthew and Tia — what brought you to the farm?

Matthew Raiford: Well, oh, no worries, I'm turning off the little heater right now. Let's see, what actually brought us to the farm — quick little anecdote. My grandmother invited my sister and me to a family reunion back in 2010, and at that reunion she happened to ask the question she always asked, which is, "What are we gonna do with all this land, baby?" And for some reason, this time when she said it, I turned my head, looked at my sister, and my sister gave me a half nod. I looked back at my nana and said, "Nana, we should go back to farming it." And she said, "Did you say we, baby?" And I said, "Yeah." And she reached under the table, looked at my aunt and my mom, and gifted us our first 12 acres of the land out here. So now we're at about 40-plus acres — my nana has since passed, and my mom is the last of her brothers and sisters, so she got a large portion of the land also during that time. So, yeah, it's been good.

Tia Raiford: And for me, marrying Matthew was the primary reason I moved to the farm. I was living in Philadelphia, had been there almost 20 years, and we moved here. But two weeks after we got married, we found out a very interesting story about my ancestry. My father's great-great-grandfather, my three-times great-grandfather — I'd known for years he was born in Georgia, in 1820, and died in Alabama in the early 20th century. Two weeks after Matthew and I got married, we found out that Bill McDonald, my great-great-grandfather, was born in Glynn County, Georgia specifically — the county we live in now. So Matthew and I look at my moving to Georgia as a 200-year return — from 1820, my ancestors moving to Alabama, which is where the nucleus of my family was enslaved, then freed, into sharecropping and owning land, to the Great Migration, and then moving back to the farm. That's given me a deeper connection to being here in the South — my first time living in the South, and living rurally. It really deepens our connection.

Lisa Lilienthal: Wonderful. So tell us a little about what you're going to share with us today — I wanna hand it over to you two, and I also want to suggest to our audience, if you have questions, drop them in the chat, and I'll do my best to ask them out loud, and we'll just be very informal about it as we go.

Matthew Raiford: Cool beans, cool beans. Okay, well, we did some harvesting earlier this morning — we grabbed peppers and onions, and we have some mushrooms that we got and dehydrated. There's a mushroom farm here called Southern Brothers Mushroom Farm, and they grow some amazing mushrooms — every time they have something new coming out, I usually try to get some and dehydrate it. Then, through our travels, friends have given us some dehydrated chanterelles too. So I've got the oyster mushrooms from Southern Brothers, chanterelles from friends, and on the very bottom, some shiitakes. We've got butternut squash

too. What I'm gonna be making today is coastal paella — in my book, coastal paella has clams, sausage, and shrimp all in the dish. All I did was take the pound and a half of meat that would've been in that dish and replace it with mushrooms and butternut squash. We're gonna have carrots, onions, and peppers, and the rice, and we also made vegetable stock, which I'll talk about in a moment.

Tia Raiford: And what I'm gonna be making today is one of the things we harvested, and have a bounty of — it's called hoja santa, also known as a root beer plant, it has a very licorice flavor. It's used in mole and Latin cuisine, and you can use it as a wrapper too.

Matthew Raiford: Whether it be a dumpling, or even something like sushi — you could blanch these for about 30 seconds, drop them in some cool water really quick, pull them out, and they're almost — they're not paper thin, but even the veins of these leaves are super soft.

Tia Raiford: Hoja santa is good because it aids digestion — it's also known for helping relieve babies who have colic. But today we're going to make a salad out of it with some romaine. It's one of my favorite things, to just go outside, grab some herbs and leaves of lettuce, and put together a salad.

Matthew Raiford: That's kind of our steady, and one of the things Tia talked about is how the root beer plant aids digestion, which helps you have a healthy gut. That's one of the things we like to talk about — where antioxidants play into things. We often hear people say, "Well, I don't get enough protein when I eat a plant-based diet, I've gotta have eggs." What I'll say is, you've gotta think about life in moderation — and that's where a plant-based diet comes in too, understanding that everything in moderation also helps the planet. Americans tend to get gung-ho and swing all the way to one side, more and more meat, or swing all the way to the other side, just plants. What we're saying is there's a happy medium, and we're gonna show how to find it, even using your exact same recipes, just replacing ingredients with vegetables.

Tia Raiford: Let's get started.

Matthew Raiford: Let's get started. Okay, so you got started right there — what were you doing over there?

Tia Raiford: So what I started with, because it's gonna take a little time, is toasting some pumpkin seeds with fennel seed — bringing out some of the oils and aromatics in the pumpkin seed, which is gonna go into my salad and add a little of that nuttiness, a little crunch. And the fennel gives that licorice-y crunch you won't get from just the pumpkin seeds alone. So that's the first thing — I'm toasting them until they start to turn a little brown, then I'll set them aside.

Lisa Lilienthal: Matthew and Tia, as you walk us through this, will you talk a little about substitutions we might make, if we don't have the particular leaf or seeds you're using?

Tia Raiford: Absolutely — if you're looking for that crunch, instead of pumpkin seeds you can use sunflower seeds, or if you want nuts, pistachios or walnuts.

Matthew Raiford: But we're in Georgia, why not pecans?

Tia Raiford: They're kind of sweet — for me they go a little too sweet, but if you wanted to, you could try walnuts too.

Matthew Raiford: This is just our normal banter in the kitchen — don't think I'm trying to one-up her on anything. Whenever we're cooking, we're still asking each other why we do something we maybe haven't done ourselves, or haven't experienced even in taste, because one of the things I'll tell you about food is that every day you're gonna be learning something. Every time you think you've got it completely down, you learn, "ooh, I've got this other thing." So never think that once you've got the recipe — a recipe's a rule and a guide, it's not —

Tia Raiford: Right, it's not, once you have the fundamentals down. So I've got these toasted to where I want them, I'm setting them aside, and adding a little of our rosemary finishing salt — we take rosemary we grow on the farm and mix it with a little pink Himalayan sea salt and fine sea salt. We use pink Himalayan sea salt for the trace minerals, which are nutrient-dense for your body, but you can use kosher salt, or just sea salt — or you can purchase our salt through our website.

Matthew Raiford: Right, there we go. Okay, so — you need something else over there, I know you've got celery to cut. I've got celery, and a little bit of onion over here — do you want this diced?

Tia Raiford: Yeah — why don't you julienne it for me? So my salad is going to have the root beer plant, a little fresh romaine, some celery — if you'd like, you could add dried fruit, I've got cherries today, but you could use dried apricots, raisins, cranberries, dried currants, anything that gives it a little sweet flavor to offset the licorice, anise flavor from the root beer plant. But let me jump over to you.

Matthew Raiford: Okay, and — really quick, can I get a little of your olive oil?

Tia Raiford: Absolutely.

Matthew Raiford: So we also bring in olive oil from one of Tia's friends, and we take all the herbs on the farm and infuse it. So right now I'm gonna use a little of that in the pan — I'll give that back to you.

Tia Raiford: Thanks.

Matthew Raiford: And then we're gonna start jumping into our paella here in a moment, as soon as we get a little heat. Do you want this in that bowl right there?

Tia Raiford: Yeah, yeah.

Matthew Raiford: So we've got our onions ready to go for Tia. I'll get into a little of the vegetables and what we're doing — I've got some carrots right here, you can see the tops are already cut off. I hear people all the time say, "oh, I'm just gonna throw that away, I don't need it, I can't really use it for anything." Well, we made some really good vegetable stock right here, and part of what went into that stock were the carrot tops. So what I'm gonna do now is cut these pieces, and I'll have a little bit of carrot left over — I'll drop that in there, and that's gonna be my next batch of stock.

Tia Raiford: It's a good way for us to use up a lot of our food waste — we don't really have what we'd call food waste. We grow, and then we utilize it — we utilize all the plants we harvest in some fashion, whether it's for us to eat, or, like Matthew said, we make an olive oil and infuse it with our herbs. We go outside and find what's available to us, and once we have scraps or

whatever's left over, we may turn it into vegetable stock. We feed our animals with it too — we have chickens, and one hog. We try to incorporate as many of the fruits and vegetables we have left over into their diet as well. And we compost.

Matthew Raiford: Right.

Tia Raiford: We do a lot of composting here.

Lisa Lilienthal: Can the camera on you come down a little, so we can see what you're doing with your hands? We wanna see that cooktop.

Matthew Raiford: All right, no worries. So — we have in here right now onions, peppers, and garlic, I'm doing a whole lot of olive oil. Okay, so we have the onions, the peppers, and the garlic in here right now, and I'm gonna toss these carrots in. So I know you see, man, this is a lot of vegetables — like I said, I need to replace the almost pound and a half, two pounds of meat that would've been in there, which would've been sausage, clams, and local shrimp. We also try to use what's in our local area, so we're cutting down on carbon emissions by using what's local — that's how we can do our one little part as an individual, because it takes more of us doing it than less of us to actually get momentum on things. All of this I got locally, from local farmers, or we grew the onions, garlic, and peppers ourselves. The carrots, the butternut squash — some folks who grow summer stuff jump right into fall stuff, and fall starts around September here.

So we've got this going right now — lastly, I'll drop in all these mushrooms. Notice I left some whole — the reason is, sometimes when we think about eating vegetables, we chop it all up, and there's nothing left to it. We wanted this dish to have a little gravitas. A little bay leaf, some crushed red pepper.

Tia Raiford: One of the things I really enjoy about eating plant-based is the satiety you get.

Matthew Raiford: Yes.

Tia Raiford: You're gonna stay fuller longer — you get this wide array of options, from the mushrooms, the squash, the peppers, the aromatics, the rice — it really keeps you fuller longer. I find eating more plant-based keeps me moving better too — when I'm exercising, I don't feel weighed down. I don't typically like to eat before a workout, but if I eat plant-based, I don't feel so weighed down.

Matthew Raiford: Definitely, definitely. So some of the other things I just dropped in — some rice, and I'm about to add some saffron threads, which is gonna add a lot of flavor. I'll tell you, on saffron threads, instead of buying that thirty-dollar jar, if you go to your local grocery store, there are smaller brands that'll have just enough saffron for your dish for about three bucks — that's another way to get some really good saffron. And lastly, we've got this really amazing vegetable stock, nice and warm — I'll pour it all in.

Lisa Lilienthal: And I want everybody watching to know that this vegetable paella recipe is something you'll get as a follow-up to the webinar today.

Matthew Raiford: Oh, I didn't see it — I got it, I'm asking for things I already have. So I've got these mushrooms in here, the rice, the butternut squash, the carrots — we're gonna let this cook for probably about 20 minutes. There'll be no movie magic here where you see the thing and

suddenly we pull it back out of the oven — this is all gonna happen right here, live, in front of you. Let me go rinse this off really quick.

Tia Raiford: And when I'm working with fresh vegetables, like salads, what I like to do is wait until the last five or six minutes before the dish is done — just making sure I have all my ingredients in place is critical, so I have my vegetables ready, and I can just toss them together with some fresh lemon juice, salt, and pepper.

Lisa Lilienthal: We have somebody who'd like the camera kept on the side, so they can see the whole process — Jen, if you want to switch back to that side focus, that's great feedback, thank you. And LaShonda's asking — we know you have farm products, is it actually possible to visit the farm and shop there? Can you tour and shop locally? Can you tell us what you've got going on?

Matthew Raiford: Okay, well, we've got a lot going on. We have, starting in September, we'll start opening up for tours at the farm, at Gilliard Farms, on Saturdays — I think I've forgotten the exact dates and times, but if you go to our website, StrongRoots9.com, or gilliard-farms.com, those dates and times will be up there. We're also adding classes — we're gonna start doing more cooking classes on the farm this fall, and things like how to make a salt and sugar scrub, how to wild-harvest fresh things growing in your yard that you can use.

Tia Raiford: How to make smudges.

Matthew Raiford: How to make smudges, things like that. After that, we're working on farm stays right now — we're currently in the process of getting some things built here at the farm. As we say in Gullah Geechee, "soon come farm stays."

Tia Raiford: While we're waiting for this, let's put the salad together.

Matthew Raiford: Okay, it's gonna be pretty quick.

Tia Raiford: What are your thoughts on what plant-based means on our farm?

Matthew Raiford: For me? I'll pick up from what I was just talking about — for me, it comes down to taking whatever we're growing that we can use and putting it into our diet. That's what it is for me — less grocery shopping, less buying vegetables at the store. This is our first year we got peaches, and plums, figs and pears.

Tia Raiford: Watermelon.

Matthew Raiford: Yeah, and watermelon, melons. So I think growing whatever it is we like to eat is very much a part of it. I harvested early this year, right as summer was coming in — I got this whole batch of potatoes I didn't even realize I'd planted in a spot. We've got turmeric and ginger growing too, and —

Tia Raiford: Lemongrass.

Matthew Raiford: And lemongrass growing. So we grow a very large amount of everything, from fruits and vegetables you can eat right off the plant to herbs, and I think a lot of our plant-based diet is eating for our health as well, which has worked well for us.

Tia Raiford: I'd agree with that. We're very fortunate that we're stewards of this land, and we live in Zone 9A, so we can pretty much grow anything except coffee and vanilla.

Matthew Raiford: Which we could actually set up, because it's been 90-plus degrees just about the whole summer — getting to that next level of tropical, a high tunnel, we probably could do. I'm actually thinking about getting some papaya trees — I love papaya, and it's very meaty when you're cooking with it too.

Tia Raiford: I would say, for me, I like to eat intentionally, looking at the health benefits of food, and eating plant-based gives me the opportunity to explore what we're growing and what we're eating. We eat a lot of oregano — it's anti-inflammatory, and so are turmeric and ginger. And not only do we eat these, we live this life — we plant rosemary and citronella, for a reason.

Matthew Raiford: For a reason. Part of it is to keep bugs down, and the other part is we eat the heck out of some rosemary.

Tia Raiford: And the land has never been treated with any chemicals, ever — we predate what would be considered organic. So making sure our environment and ecosystem support us living plant-based is also important, because what we're growing is affected by what's out there, whether it's deer or mosquitoes, and what we're doing to curtail that all goes into plant-based living too.

Matthew Raiford: I think the other way to think about a plant-based diet is fresh is best. A lot of times we go into grocery stores and people recognize us and say, "oh my goodness, I can't wait to see what's in your basket," and we're like, it's a bunch of ingredients. Most people say we don't have food in our house, we have ingredients — lots and lots of ingredients to work with. But someone on one of our trips once asked how we were gonna serve all these vegetables in our cart, and they said, "well, what are you gonna do with fresh mint and fresh chives?" Well, Tia went into where the mint was — we make mint tea, we use mint in a lot of our fruit salads to give it that extra little something, with lemon and lime. We were standing in the greens area, and Tia said, "look, if you're not growing fresh herbs, use these little fresh packets up here" — you know it hasn't been sitting in somebody's warehouse for 12 years before finally being called fresh, you know it's actually fresh. So even shopping at the grocery store like that — greens, for sure, get that chlorophyll in your system — and think about buying things that come in bunches, a bunch of carrots instead of bagged carrots. Understanding those kinds of things is also very important.

Tia Raiford: I think another thing — I just spent a week teaching someone and their family how to eat plant-based, on a healthier trajectory. The one thing I took away from that, aside from being able to cook with three generations of a family and teach them how to cook plant-based and eat healthy, was — I said to the gentleman, "I'll give you a piece of advice: divorce your freezer." If you're able to look in your refrigerator every day and see all the fresh vegetables and herbs you have, whether you grow it outside or just buy it — utilize the refrigerator as your working inventory, to eat fresher, eat healthier.

Matthew Raiford: Right. There's a crisper inside the refrigerator for a reason — that little zone that says "vegetables," it's there for a reason. If you fill it up with fresh vegetables, maybe some fresh fruit too, and use it —

Tia Raiford: Make sure they're visible.

Matthew Raiford: — on a daily basis, right, make sure it's not tucked all the way in the back, where you go, "oh yeah, that's right, I did — oh, it went bad." Tia and I, and let me say this, I know we all have busy lives, let's wrap our minds around having a busy life — we've got the husband, the wife, the partner, the bags, the kids, now we've got kids, and the dog, our own mom and dad, and now we have animals, and this big house, and we've gotta take care of all these things. So here's a way to start wrapping our minds around it — we only have 24 hours in the day, so let's talk about what's important, for your family, for you, and for the environment. If you start thinking slowly in that arena, you'll be surprised — we've watched this happen, families with full pantries of chips and dip and all the things, move to, "oh, you know what, we're gonna have salsa this week." They went and got the stuff, made the salsa, made their own chips, and ta-da — they were like, "oh, this is so much better than us going to the grocery store." You made it on Sunday, you've got it for almost a week, the kids are eating it instead of all the processed stuff. So that's another way to think about it — you've only got 24 hours in a day, take what time you can to make things important. Very, very important. That's part of being plant-based too — I think the word you used is intentional.

Tia Raiford: Yeah, it's intentional. And for me, I think if you're leading a busy life, eating plant-based is actually an easier style of cooking, because you don't have to — proteins take time.

Matthew Raiford: Right, yeah — you wanna talk about fast and quick, let's talk veggies.

Tia Raiford: Right. So we're gonna have lunch ready here, and it took us —

Matthew Raiford: I don't know, an hour?

Tia Raiford: An hour. I mean, you made stock.

Matthew Raiford: Yeah, but normally we have stock, that's another thing — we make enough stock, so if you want something in your freezer, put your stock in your freezer, and always have some of that.

Tia Raiford: Right. So what are you doing now?

Matthew Raiford: I'm using a little more of this gray salt in here — it's like a gray sea salt. If you notice, I dropped a little in my hand, did a quick taste, so I can figure out I've got about maybe 10 more minutes on this before it's cooked down. So let me finish off my seasoning — and look at the color the saffron has brought in, this is like — I am so happy right now, I don't know what to say.

Lisa Lilienthal: This is when we wish we could smell it too.

Matthew Raiford: I know, we wish we had Smell-O-Vision — we're trying to figure out how to do the Smell-O-Vision thing. We haven't figured out what the app's gonna look like, but trust me, we are trying.

Lisa Lilienthal: That looks amazing. We have somebody watching along during her lunch break, probably getting hungry — she's curious what, outside of mushrooms and squash recipes, are some of your favorite late-summer produce items to incorporate into a plant-based diet, to transition gradually?

Matthew Raiford: Late summer — tomatoes, peas, fresh peas I think. We've still got people pulling up, I mean, we had some leftover carrots, but —

Tia Raiford: Zucchini.

Matthew Raiford: Zucchini, yellow squash —

Tia Raiford: Fresh zucchini or yellow squash, I'd say, are in peak season right now.

Lisa Lilienthal: Very abundant, right?

Matthew Raiford: Yeah.

Tia Raiford: I'll tell you, it's one of my favorite vegetables — you can roast it, grill it, add it to a stew, eat it raw. I've made a cucumber avocado salad dressing on a zucchini salad — it's vegetable on vegetable on vegetable. But yeah, I'd say zucchini and summer squash are two of my favorites right now.

Matthew Raiford: Yeah, and if you were using it in this, I'd say chunk it, make it a little thicker, not super thin pieces. And I'd put it in right about now, because zucchini and yellow squash are more water-based vegetables than the other squashes — they don't need a lot of heat, barely enough to almost sear the outside. The pan should be super hot, or, if you're putting it into something like this, where there's still liquid left, you can see the steam coming off — that liquid and heat will cook it in less than five or ten minutes, with a big chunk. Try to cut it that way again.

Lisa Lilienthal: We have another question — Jackie's wondering, have y'all planted citrus yet, have you tried it? She's trying limes in Athens, and said, "we'll see."

Matthew Raiford: Okay, so we've planted Persian limes here — last year we only got a few, they were only about two years old, going into their third year now, so we're hoping we get some Persian limes. We haven't tried oranges, we really haven't tried a lot of citrus, but the limes have done well here in the past. So now you've got me pushed, I've gotta get some orange trees.

Lisa Lilienthal: And Jackie's gotta let us know how those limes work out in Athens.

Matthew Raiford: Yeah, definitely.

Tia Raiford: Hello to Athens.

Matthew Raiford: Hello to Athens, there you go. I'll also say, Jackie, pay attention to the winter too, get yourself some landscape cloth or something to tent it when you think there might be a freeze, so it traps in some warm air and protects the citrus.

Tia Raiford: Yeah.

Matthew Raiford: Definitely. Do you wanna hop on your side? We've got about five minutes left — I'm gonna have a glass of water, I've been talking a lot.

Tia Raiford: Okay, so first thing I'm gonna do is cut up some celery — I love celery. I spent some time in China during the 2008 Olympics, I was a chef there, and I got to see celery sauteed by itself, with a little salt and pepper, stir-fried, and it was brilliant. Celery's a great fibrous vegetable, has a good amount of water — I'm gonna cut this on a bias, thinly.

Matthew Raiford: Are you gonna use all the celery?

Tia Raiford: I may — would you like some?

Matthew Raiford: No, I just wanted to know, because the celery could also go inside this dish, toward the very end, for a light bit of crunch.

Tia Raiford: Yeah.

Matthew Raiford: We do that — you know, when you go places and get those amazing buffalo wings, or make your own at home. That might be what we have tonight for dinner, plant-based buffalo wings — but if we're talking about celery, one of the things we've really loved is celery and carrots, since that's what always comes with guacamole. But now our big thing is eating celery and guacamole. These vegetables are very, very versatile — most of the 20 or 30 vegetables you find in a normal grocery store, there's such a multiplicity of things you can do with them. And they're also good, like I said, let's not waste any of it — anything left over, let's turn it into stock, because that's your second use of the same vegetables. Then you take those cooked vegetables and put them in the compost, and they'll break down twice as fast as they would otherwise. So you've nourished yourself when you first ate, you've made stock, and lastly you've given back to Mother Nature what she gave you. When we think about cutting down carbon emissions, imagine — you've taken one item and used it three times, hardly anybody does that. Imagine, you drove to the store to buy compost when you could've made it, you drove to the store to buy vegetable stock when you could've made it. So if you do all of this with the vegetables you buy, you don't have to go back to the store for vegetable stock, you don't have to go to the store for anything — you literally have everything you need in front of you. That's another part of it — a plant-based diet is utilization of every single part of the plant.

Tia Raiford: So here I'm cutting my romaine into kind of bigger pieces — I want them to retain their crunch, and once I season it with salt, pepper, and lemon juice, it's going to start to wilt. So even these wiltier leaves, I'm just going to put into our compost pile. And the hoja santa, I'm cutting down the middle, then chopping it, so we get some nice big leaves in there.

Matthew Raiford: Now, do you need to rub that with olive oil or anything, like you would kale?

Tia Raiford: No, it doesn't have that much fiber — it has probably the texture of, let's say, green leaf lettuce. It's very light. And I'm gonna put this in.

Matthew Raiford: Now I know you're probably thinking, "did she just say we can throw the lettuce into our stock?" Yes, you can throw the lettuce into your stock too.

Tia Raiford: I'm gonna cut my fresh lemon.

Matthew Raiford: Like that.

Tia Raiford: Oh, you get super fancy.

Matthew Raiford: Yes — we didn't even talk about this beforehand, this was a whole thing where we both decided on two dishes we both liked and knew how to do, and we said, "hey, what are you doing today?" We just put all of this together today, so I don't want you to think, oh, they planned all of this — no, we literally went out and got the peppers and onions this morning.

Tia Raiford: This morning.

Matthew Raiford: This morning.

Tia Raiford: We just harvested this hoja santa also.

Matthew Raiford: Yeah.

Tia Raiford: So I'm gonna take a little of my toasted pumpkin seeds and fennel, add that in — and if you don't like romaine, you can also use green leaf, red leaf —

Matthew Raiford: You can use frisée if you like.

Tia Raiford: You can use frisée.

Matthew Raiford: If you've got some arugula, it should be the peppery-est arugula you can possibly get — that way it doesn't burn out the taste.

Tia Raiford: And I'm adding some dried cherries, just to add a little sweetness, to offset the anise and licorice flavor. I added some of our herb-infused olive oil, and now I'll add some lemon juice.

Lisa Lilienthal: Y'all, is the herb-infused olive oil something we can shop for on your website?

Matthew Raiford: Yes.

Lisa Lilienthal: Okay, yes.

Matthew Raiford: Fabulous — well, here's why we said it like this. This past Friday was my birthday, and we launched our full spice line, called Hard Grind — coffee, tea, spices, and olive oil. Think about it, you grind coffee, you grind tea, you grind spices, and you grind the olive to get the olive oil, so, henceforth, Hard Grind. Plus, it's also the name of one of Tia's father's albums. So we just launched it, please go to the website — as a matter of fact, I believe some people are gonna be winning our full spice line and a cookbook today too.

Lisa Lilienthal: That's right — five folks who registered for the webinar are entered into a drawing, and will receive a package that includes a cookbook and a spice or blend, in the next couple of weeks.

Matthew Raiford: There you go. So — I was just giving you a little bowl.

Tia Raiford: That is delicious.

Matthew Raiford: Mm-hmm, are you sure? Can I have some?

Tia Raiford: Yes — there's red onion in there also.

Matthew Raiford: Oh, goodness.

Tia Raiford: Which you could use shallots instead, or a Vidalia if you want a sweet onion.

Matthew Raiford: Isn't that good? That's a really good licorice-y flavor. Oh, my gosh.

Tia Raiford: So simple, easy. Topping it off with a little more pumpkin seeds — how much celery have you got in there?

Matthew Raiford: Some. I was just wondering.

Tia Raiford: You want some more? Here.

Matthew Raiford: I think it needs some, yeah, there we go.

Tia Raiford: And this might be my lunch for the day, with a little Wasa bread.

Matthew Raiford: Uh-oh, our timing is perfect, look at that.

Tia Raiford: Here — so this is your hoja santa salad, with romaine, celery, red onion, cherry, and pumpkin seeds. Looks amazing.

Matthew Raiford: Looks amazing. My dish looks as amazing as your dish — I've just cut into it. So, when you're making a paella, there's something called a socarrat, the burnt rice on the bottom — this did that just the way I wanted, and I so appreciate it.

Lisa Lilienthal: Can we get the camera on that, Matthew?

Matthew Raiford: Oh yeah, yeah, we're most certainly gonna get the camera on that. So we've got some of this right down in — oh, goodness, here we go — get some of that burnt part down there, there we go. So we take this dish —

Tia Raiford: And you can top it with some of the salad.

Matthew Raiford: And then, yeah, I take a little fresh parsley —

Tia Raiford: And just rip it up.

Matthew Raiford: And just rip it up over the top. Then I have this very nice dish right here.

Tia Raiford: A little bit of salad.

Matthew Raiford: And then you've got a little salad off to the side, and one fork and one bowl to wash — then guess what, you're cutting down on carbon emissions again.

Lisa Lilienthal: That's right. As you're finishing plating that, our friend Jackie the lime farmer reminds us that eggplants are amazing in late summer, and the plant is rather deer resistant.

Matthew Raiford: Yes, yes, yes, and I love that fact, because I was thinking I'd use eggplant the same way I use zucchini — not throw it in until the very end. And the celery right here would also give this a little crunch if you added it toward the end, keeps everything from getting soft. I mean, if you look at these — these are the ends of the mushroom right here — and oyster mushrooms are so meaty, y'all, so meaty. I'm gonna have a little bit for Kara.

Lisa Lilienthal: Just a reminder that everybody who signed up for the webinar will receive this recipe in your follow-up email, and several of you will be receiving a cookbook and spice pack in the mail as a thank-you for joining us. You've all got a link to the website — the Strong Roots 9 website is also where you can pick up these spice packs, infused olive oils, and all that good stuff. Maybe, Matthew, talk a little about what your cookbook is all about.

Matthew Raiford: For sure, for sure — it's right there. So my cookbook is called Bress 'n' Nyam, which means "bless and eat" in Gullah Geechee. Part of the reason I named it that was, when I

was working with the writer, we were talking about all the different sayings people use right before they eat, and Bress 'n' Nyam is what rose up — bless and eat. I wanted the cookbook to have that feel, to be blessed and eat. It's based on my origin story — Gullah Geechee recipes from a six-generation farmer, having been raised here in Brunswick, Georgia, and my father's family being Connecticut by way of North Carolina. So there are things in the book that make people ask, "how is that Gullah Geechee?" And I say, it's because it's what my mom did — there's a recipe in there, my mom makes shrimp creole, and the reason it's called shrimp creole is actually more like coastal paella than a true creole dish, but her best friend from New Orleans showed her how to make it, and my mom just called it shrimp creole, that was it, it was never called paella. So I have both recipes in the book, to show how we're more alike around the country in the foods we eat than people might think.

I have some things in there, and if you like game, I've got a few things on that too. But I'll say this — when my book first came out, we got an email that said, "your book is beautiful."

Tia Raiford: "But I probably won't buy it, because it's probably full of meat dishes."

Matthew Raiford: And I was like, whoa, because apparently they didn't even look at the book. The very first chapter is called Earth. The very first chapter of the book is completely plant-forward, and then I break everything else down into Wind, Fire, and Water. But Earth started right off, because I wanted people to understand that the thought process around vegetables, for people of African descent, works just like it does everywhere else — what you're exposed to is what you get to eat and consume. And this exposure we've had, to hoja santa, one of my favorites, to pepitas, to paella and rice — all of those things come from our environment. That's what Tia and I have been able to build together too — Tia has a very Northern, Mediterranean focus in her cooking, and when we cook together, it's still very reminiscent of the way our grandparents or great-grandparents would have cooked together, if that was ever a thing — it's like, "here's what we've got, baby, let's get ready to go into this." So I'd say that's kind of who and what we are. We're here at Gilliard Farms in Brunswick, Georgia — we're Strong Roots 9 at Gilliard Farms. We know that everything starts from the soil, and we try to ensure that part of what we do is give back to the soil —

Tia Raiford: So it continues to give to us.

Matthew Raiford: So it continues to give to us — especially even our seafood. One of the things you saw me do with compost when you first got here was fish scraps — we use fish scraps too, another way for us to consistently use whatever comes our way, to help us grow and be well.

Lisa Lilienthal: Well, thank you both so much, you made that beautiful lunch — we're gonna let you get to it. We thank you for your time and your generosity, sharing your wonderful farm and everything you create with us. I'd just invite all our participants — this has been recorded, we'll share it back with you, you're welcome to share it with friends and family. You'll receive the recipe, and some lucky folks will receive things from the store — and those who don't, but are curious, can go to the website to learn more. Thank you both so much, we appreciate you.

Tia Raiford: You're welcome, again. Namaste.

Lisa Lilienthal: Thank you.