TABLE®

NEW MEXICO

Spring to Life

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WHAT PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT AT THE TABLE NEXT TO YOU

Plus

A DAY IN THE GARDEN AT LOS POBLANOS, A GORGEOUS DINNER AT SANTA FE'S WILD LIFE, CHEF DAVID RUIZ ROCKS IT OUT AT ALBUQUERQUE'S SCALO, CHOKOLÁ BRINGS SOUTH AMERICAN CHOCOLATE TO TAOS

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Our passion began a quarter century ago with distilling lavender essential oil and botanical hydrosols for our artisanal spa products. Now it has blossomed to include botanical spirits. Crafted by a team of dedicated farmers, gardeners, herbalists, distillers and mixologists, our new western-style gins are made with traditional steam distillation techniques and a blend of botanicals that express the flavor of Los Poblanos' historic farm and gardens and the essence of the Rio Grande Valley.

Enjoy a signature gin cocktail at Campo, Town and Ranch or Bar Norte in Santa Fe. Available by the bottle at Los Poblanos' retail locations and purveyors throughout New Mexico.

LOSPOBLANOS.COM

A GARDENE

STORY BY JULIA PLATT LEONARD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIRA HOWARD
SHOT ON LOCATION AT LOS POBLANOS HISTORIC INN & ORGANIC FARM

R'S GARDEN

Wes Brittenham, director of horticulture at Los Poblanos Historic Inn & Organic Farm, gives TABLE readers a magical tour of the verdant, sustainable growing fields tucked around the resort, spa, restaurant, and shop. Along the way, he points out many varieties home gardeners can try this summer.

I've had a kitchen garden for years, growing potatoes by the bucketful, green beans that happily spill out of containers, and peppery arugula that nestles in hanging baskets. My London garden is a small slice of green in an urban landscape. Bordered by brick walls on three sides and our house on the fourth, it's a warm microclimate where temperatures rarely dip below freezing. If water is an issue, it's too much rather than too little.

I'm trading that for a new garden in Santa Fe where conditions couldn't be more different. The challenge for me—and any keen gardener in New Mexico—is to create a kitchen garden where water is precious and temperatures dip in the winter and soar in the summer. What should I plant and how can I make my garden thrive? For help, I turned to Wes Brittenham, director of horticulture at Los Poblanos, whose passion for plants and Southwestern gardening is infectious.

LOS POBLANOS HISTORIC INN & ORGANIC FARM spreads over 25 acres in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque with lush lavender fields, formal gardens and around four acres dedicated to growing food for Campo, Los Poblanos' award-winning restaurant, and herbs used in spa treatments and body-care elixirs. Wes takes me on a tour and tells me that what they grow is a collaboration between the kitchen and the gardeners with a focus on heirloom and native varieties that are adapted to be more heat and drought tolerant. And while you and I might not have room for our own beehive or a handy guinea fowl to keep garden pests under control, there is much we can learn from the way they garden at Los Poblanos.

In their fields you'll find Sungold cherry tomatoes, a high-yield, super-sweet variety; deep purple eggplants like the meaty Black Beauty and the slender, paler purple Orient Charm; sweet corn, popping corn, and a variety of Indigenous blue corn; and, of course, chiles like the small, spicy Aji Crystal, colorful and compact Chinese Five-Color and the mild poblano; as well as lesser known—and appreciated—plants like amaranth, with its stunning red leaves and plumes. Not only does amaranth add architectural elegance to the garden, you can eat both leaves and seeds. Campo head chef and New Mexico native Chris Bethoney suggests sautéing the leaves like chard adding that, "sometimes we'll take the leaf because it's such a beautiful red and imprint it on a tortilla or tamale."

Opposite: At Los Poblanos, lavender is harvested for its essential oil. *This page:* Director of Horticulture Wes Brittenham with a freshly picked, edible flower petal.

Lavendo
Los Poblanos Farm

If you're keen to grow fruit, Wes suggests peach varieties like Contender or Hale-Haven; Jonathan apples; sour cherries or Moorpark apricots with their pink-tinged blossoms. Or try your hand at unfamiliar fruits like the Jujube (also known as Chinese date) which thrives in a warm, dry climate and can tolerate cold winters. It's a great pollinator plant and is super-xeric so won't need frequent watering. (Chris has used them in a pecan shortbread recipe and is experimenting with poaching them in a simple syrup.)

Wes says no matter what you grow, start with the soil. "Here in the desert, we always have to add organic material." Home composting is one of the best things you can do and it doesn't have to be a complex or expensive system. He suggests plastic garbage cans with secure lids and holes punched in them for drainage. Start with dry leaves and pine needles in the base then add potato peelings, vegetable scraps and coffee grounds—almost any plant-based waste. You can even add charcoal from a fire pit, which "sweetens the soil," he says.

Install a drip irrigation system rather than overhead watering. "The idea with drip irrigation is that you might water for an hour very slowly and deeply," Wes says. Water at night when there is less ground evaporation and the roots have a chance to absorb the water. And never leave soil uncovered. "Bare soil is the enemy of any desert garden," he says. Cover with several inches of compost and top with a layer of barley straw.

It's looking at gardens in a different way he says. While cardoons flourish at Los Poblanos, he finds its relative, the artichoke (they're both members of the *Cynara* genus), is more fiddly. "Mother Nature is in charge, we're not," he laughs. Wes plants borage, an edible flower with periwinkle blue blossoms, alongside tomatoes to deter sphinx moths. "Could be an old wives' tale but it seems to work," he says.

Dahlias can do double duty as a cut flower and ingredient, the petals becoming an edible, citrus-inflected cup for small, ripe strawberries. Nasturtium leaves have a peppery, wasabi-like flavor, while the edible pods can be stored in salt and used like capers. It's all about choosing plants that earn their place in your garden, like the perennial Cota (*Thelesperma megapotamicum*), also known as Navajo, Zuni, Hopi or Indian tea. A member of the aster family, it has bright yellow flowers and is used to make a delicious (and medicinal) herbal tea and also as a dye plant. "Why not have kale in the beds with your shade trees or perennial flowers?" asks Wes. Why not indeed. "Maybe food is all over the yard," he suggests.

As we finish up our tour, Wes points out a tasting basket full of fresh produce his team picked that day. It's a handy way to show visitors what's in season and what they'll see on their plates that night, like Chris's pasta made with tomato leaves and topped with sautéed tomatoes, eggplant, garlic, and herbs, all straight from the garden.

We make a final stop at the Campo bar for cocktails made with Los Poblanos' two new botanical gins made in the New Western, as opposed to the London Dry, style. That means juniper is less dominant, providing plenty of room for other aromatic plants to shine. The move into making gin is a natural one since they've been growing and distilling botanicals for their Los Poblanos beauty range for over two decades.

But most importantly, how do the gins taste? The Western Dry gin is smooth, complex, and distilled with a staggering 16 botanicals from the farm, including piñon, rose, hawthorn, and chamomile. The Los Poblanos Lavender Gin is distilled with four different lavender varietals and from the first sip feels like a drinkable walk through their lavender fields. Both are quaffable treats.

As we lift our glasses and toast my new garden, I ask for any last words of advice. Wes says it's pretty basic: "Work with nature, never against it."

lospoblanos.com

Opposite, clockwise from upper left: A seasonal tasting basket filled with bounty from the garden ready for Campo, Los Poblanos' restaurant. Farm manager Maxfield Bervig distills lavender on-site in alembic copper stills. Chamomile, lemongrass, and pomegranat are just a few of the crops grown at Los Poblanos. Garnishing a signature dish of Tomato Leaf Pasta. Chris Bethoney, head chef at Campo.

THREE GUINEAS

Delight your taste buds with the rich, herbaceous notes of this signature drink from Campo, the restaurant nestled into the growing fields at Los Poblanos. It features Los Poblanos Western Dry Gin, distilled with botanicals grown on-site.

- 1½ oz Los Poblanos Western Dry Gin Blend, sage-infused*
- ¼ oz green chartreuse
- 1 tsp Campari
- ½ oz grapefruit juice
- ⅜ oz simple syrup
- ⅜ oz lemon juice
- 2 drops saline
- 1 drop Peychaud's Bitters

Shake for 10 seconds, then strain into an iced snifter. Garnish with a lemon twist and a sage sprig when in season.

***Sage-infused gin:** Use 1 ounce of sage per bottle of gin (2 parts pure gin to 1 part sage-infused gin concentrate). Refrigerate infusion for 4 days before straining.

Los Poblanos Historic Inn & Organic Farm
lospoblanos.com

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Rehm's Nursery
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Alameda Greenhouse
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Try your hand at growing some of the plants at Los Poblanos Farm, such as Mexican hat, cardoon, and firewheel, and look into these resources for seeds, starts, and saplings.

Opposite: Three Guineas, one of Los Poblanos' signature cocktails made with their own gin and decorated with sage leaves from the garden. *This page:* Wes Brittenham cups a just-picked strawberry in a dahlia petal.