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TASTE

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DAILY CAMERA

SECTION

Tiny burst of flavor



Photos by MARK LEFFINGWELL / Daily Camera

Microgreen mixes by Grow Anywhere Air-Foods are used by 19 Boulder County restaurants. Here, a microgreen mix garnishes smoked salmon and bread. **Top**, onion microgreens are a popular garnish grown at Grow Anywhere Air-Foods.

Local company's aeroponic microgreens garnish many restaurant plates in Boulder



Rows of greens grow on special racks at Grow Anywhere Air-Foods in Frederick.

By Cindy Sutter

Camera Staff Writer

When your entree comes at many a restaurant in downtown Boulder, you're likely to notice an intensely flavorful and colorful garnish on your plate.

Microgreens are not new. Bon Appetit named the stage beyond sprouts, but before baby greens, a "what's next" ingredient in 2005, an age ago in the fast-evolving restaurant biz. But the corn shoots you'll find at Prima Ristorante, the Asian mix at Sushi Tora, the Latin mix at Ahi and Tahona, and Mediterranean mix at The Med aren't nurtured in a greenhouse by a local farmer trying to make a little money in the winter. They are raised aeroponically in a 3,000-square-foot warehouse in Frederick by a Longmont optician and the former manager of a small plastic injection molding operation. The two got into the business of garnishing plates after selling the growing equipment for years.

"A year ago, in September 2005, we were talking and decided that to sell more equipment we would really have to have a working model of a farm," says Mark Haberer, production manager. Larry Forrest, the optician, put up most of the money, and they spent the next few months tinkering with the equipment and choosing the greens.

The result of their work is a company, Grow Anywhere Air-Foods, with a portfolio of several flavorful mixes geared for various cuisines. The firm sells to about 100 restaurants in the Denver metro area, including 19 in Boulder County. The base for the mix contains three mustard greens, lettuce, bianca rica endive, tatsoi,

*Please see **MICROGREENS** on 3F*

"You can have fresh, green living things on the plate," he says. "It makes it so it's not like eating canned peas in winter."

How does the microgreen garden grow?

Haberer puts seeds on a fiber mesh. The seeds grow into the mesh, and are then transferred to what's called a production platform, where they receive light. A high-pressure system sprays super-fine filtered water droplets with dissolved nutrients directly onto the roots of the plant. One advantage is that the plants grow fast. Many are ready in about two weeks, and some stay fresh as long as three weeks.

Haberer, a former sous chef, says the taste is more vibrant than with greens grown in soil, and there's no danger of contamination with pathogens.

The company is working on organic certification, since the nutrients it uses, a chitin deriva-

tive from insects and crustacean shells has recently been approved as an organic substance. If the nutrients sound a little strange, keep in mind that fish products and earthworm castings are commonly added to the soil by organic farmers.

The company may eventually sell its greens to local natural foods stores. But it's the restaurant market that is its main target. Grow Anywhere hopes to expand to Las Vegas, San Francisco, Chicago and New York.

In the meantime, its product line grows, sometimes at the request of local chefs. Nasturtiums and other flowers are in the testing phase now.

So it could be that your first blooms of spring this year will not be the jonquils in your yard, but the flavorful flowers on your plate.

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