



## COOK WITH KELP

Vancouver Island's rich seaweed diversity has captivated chefs and foragers alike, including Sea Forest founder Kristina Long, who cultivates macroalgae to make innovative edible products. Here, she shares her insights into this coastal superfood. Words: Sarah Lee

### What makes Vancouver Island such a special place for kelp?

Take a beach walk here, and you'll discover a spectacular variety. The region's exceptional biodiversity is due to Canada's west coast sitting at the end of a global marine current, flowing from the Norwegian Sea and around South America. This brings cold, nutrient-rich waters that nourish thriving plants.

### Where can visitors experience the best of this ingredient?

Many local restaurants feature kelp, offering plenty of tasting opportunities. For those keen to forage it, Amanda Swinimer of Victoria's Dakini Tidal Wilds runs expert-led tours. Vancouver Island University also offers workshops, while Fanny Bay Seafoods in Vancouver hosts various chef demonstrations.

**Why do you think kelp is having such a moment?** It's such a versatile ingredient. It can be made into noodles and pickles, and we're even developing a new drink called Ocean Tea. Kelp is packed with minerals and nutrients, from iron to magnesium. It's also high in potassium salt but low in sodium, so it has the savoury umami taste, but is a heart-healthy salt alternative. Plus, pound for pound there's more vitamin C in kelp than in oranges, and more calcium than in milk.

**How do you approach kelp farming sustainably?** We harvest from huge beds in many locations, taking only 10% of each. Plus, we only trim the outer canopy, allowing more sunlight to reach other species of kelp and seaweed below. It's like pruning a fruit tree. So even with our farming, beds have expanded.

**Are there any collaborations you're particularly proud of?** Our co-op. Traditionally in Canada, forestry and commercial fishing operations that set up in First Nation territories didn't compensate those communities. We operate in 20 territories and have a profit-share system. We offer employment and training, while the First Nations contribute to farming techniques and site selection for our farms, based on oral history handed down through generations.

**What does the future hold for kelp?** It's a relatively new industry and at the moment only a few companies are growing it. I think we'll see the development of lots more food and wellness products. I also envision more culinary events will develop as restaurants add kelp to their menus. For now, though, kelp dishes at Pacific Prime Restaurant & Lounge and Tigh Na Mara Hotel — both in Parksville — are particularly good, as are those at Wolf in the Fog, in Tofino.

From left to right: Kristina Long harvests kelp from vast beds in several locations; mussels and pappardelle with kelp cream; the Broken Group Islands, off the west coast of Vancouver Island

### Mussels & pappardelle with kelp cream

Kristina recommends this recipe by British Columbia-based chef Ned Bell. Ned is regularly seen on Canadian television and is an advocate for sustainable food systems.

**SERVES: 4** **TAKES: 30 MINS**

#### INGREDIENTS

##### KELP CREAM

½ tbsp canola oil  
½ shallot, finely chopped  
1 clove garlic, finely chopped  
1 bird's-eye chilli, seeded and finely chopped  
355ml whipping cream, plus extra if needed  
125g fresh kelp or 40g dried bull or winged kelp, rinsed (if dried, soak in warm water for 10 mins)  
½ lime, zested  
½ tsp sesame oil  
Sea salt, to taste

#### MUSSELS & PAPPARDELLE

1.4kg live mussels  
450g pappardelle or fettuccine  
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil  
2 tbsp unsalted butter  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
1 shallot, finely chopped  
60ml white wine  
3 tbsp sliced fresh basil  
3 tbsp dried crushed bull or winged kelp  
1 to 2 lemons, zested and juiced  
1 tsp crushed red pepper (optional)

#### METHOD

##### KELP CREAM

1 Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat, add shallots and garlic and sauté for 30 secs, until fragrant.  
2 Add remaining ingredients, simmer on medium heat for 5 mins.  
3 Transfer mixture to a food processor and blend together until completely smooth.  
4 Strain puree through a sieve.

#### MUSSELS & PAPPARDELLE

1 Rinse mussels in a colander under cold water. Discard any that are open or that have broken shells.  
2 Boil a saucepan of salted water and add pasta. Cook until al dente.  
3 Meanwhile, heat oil and butter in a frying pan over medium-high heat. Add garlic and shallots and sauté for 5 mins, until translucent. Pour in wine and bring to a boil.  
4 Add mussels, cover and cook for 2 mins, until the shells open up.  
5 Add kelp cream and cook for another 2 mins.  
6 Stir in basil, dried kelp, lemon zest and juice, and crushed red pepper (if using). Drain pasta and stir it into the pan of mussels.  
7 Transfer to a serving bowl and then serve.  
*Excerpt from Vancouver Eats: Signature Recipes from the City's Best Restaurants*

### KRISTINA'S TOP KELP DISHES

**KELP NOODLES:** Made from sliced kelp, they have the same texture as linguine pasta noodles or rice noodles, but are glossier and don't have any starch or stickiness.

**BANANA BREAD:** Some people use pureed courgette to add moisture, I substitute that with kelp puree.

**SAUCES:** I add frozen kelp cubes to an alfredo sauce, for example. It's a great substitute for herbs like parsley and for chives in chive butter.



IMAGES: SEA FOREST; MACRO ALGAE; KEVIN CLARK; ALAMY

