

## The Garden Grill: A Dining Review

by Mary Albright, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Do you go to The Land Pavilion, run down the stairs to hit Soarin' and then leave?

The Garden Grill seems to fly under the radar for a lot of visitors to Epcot. Most people associate table service restaurants with the World Showcase and overlook the Garden Grill as an option.

The Garden Grill is located in The Land Pavilion in Epcot and is only open for dinner. We visited in early December and had a reservation for 5:15 pm. We checked in shortly after 5:00 pm and were glad we had that reservation. There was quite a large group of people in the waiting area. Our pager buzzed about 5 minutes later and we were shown to our table.

If you've never visited the Garden Grill before, it's probably helpful to know that the restaurant slowly rotates, and that it overlooks the Living with The Land attraction. Don't worry; if you are prone to motion sickness, this will not be a problem for you. Garden Grill rotates very slowly. It takes about an hour for it to make one full revolution.

We were shown to our table on the upper level and were greeted shortly thereafter by our server, Chris. Chris talked about the menu, which had slightly been updated from the menu I had seen online before arriving. He was very knowledgeable, friendly and efficient.

He took our drink orders and returned shortly with them and our first part of the meal: Oatmeal rolls with maple butter and a mixed greens salad with an apple vinaigrette dressing with smoky bacon.

We all loved the rolls so much that we asked for another basket right away. My kids weren't too crazy about sweetened butter, but my husband and I yummed it right up. I'm a big salad fan and I found this salad to be wonderfully fresh. And there was just enough dressing to taste the flavor and not be soggy. I ate almost the whole bowl myself.

The meal is served family-style (meaning they bring it to your table on platters and each person chooses their serving) and is all you can eat. It consisted of grilled salt and pepper flank steak, roasted turkey breast and a sustainable fresh fish of the day. The fish changes each day. On the day we visited, it was a freshly breaded mahi-mahi. Oh - I was in heaven! Mahi-mahi is my favorite type of fish.

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Our side dishes included a cranberry-orange relish sauce, mashed potatoes, apple cornbread stuffing, and roasted vegetables.

Kids can eat the adult offerings, or they can get a kid's plate with their choice of chicken nuggets or mac and cheese. What I love about the Garden Grill is that a good portion of their vegetables served are grown right in the Land pavilion. In our vegetable dish, we had carrots, rutabaga and brussel sprouts.

Everything was fantastic. The steak was perfectly done. The turkey was oh-so-moist and tender. The gravy included with the meal was flavorful. Of course, I loved the fish.

And let's not forget that this is a character meal experience. This is not our primary reason for going to Garden Grill, but let's face it; when Mickey comes to your table, it just makes your day. Farmer Mickey, Pluto, Chip, and (naturally) Dale made the rounds several times. I think this restaurant offers the very best character interaction of any place on property. The restaurant is small enough that the characters see you multiple times. And they spend so much time with you, if you want them to. I watched the older couple behind our table interact with the characters. At one point, the gentleman was at the table by himself and Mickey just came up and sat down across from him for a few minutes. I recall one of our earliest visits, when my kids were probably six and seven years old, and Chip knelt at the edge of the table and colored with them for a minute or two. This is just a place where character interaction is so much more personal.

And let us not forget dessert! My son's birthday happened to be that day. Chris was very kind and attentive to bring a birthday cupcake, and he lit it just as Mickey was getting to our table again. He was a fabulous server.

Even though I have teenagers, they brought out the kids dessert for them; Worms and Dirt -- chocolate pudding with crushed up Oreos and Gummy Worms on the top. Thank you so much for knowing that teenagers love that type of dessert. My kids were completely pleased.

The main dessert is a fruit cobbler that changes daily. We happened to get the blueberry buckle cobbler with freshly made vanilla bean whipped cream on top. First off, this made my husband's day because blueberry buckle is his favorite fruit dessert. Second, this whipped cream puts Cool Whip to shame. It also puts any homemade whipped cream to shame. It was fabulous.

It's not cheap to eat here. Dinner is \$30.99 per adult, \$14.99 for kids 3-9,

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but soft drinks are included.

Please don't let the fact that this restaurant is family-style make you feel the food is inferior. If you are looking for fancy, you won't get it here. But if you are looking for home cooking with a twist, this is your place.

*About The Author: Mary Albright is a return PassPorter News Guest Contributor. Married with two children, she lives in Minnesota and works as a Virtual Assistant. She has visited Walt Disney World more than 15 times since 2000. She has two trips in the works for June 2010 and December 2010.*

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