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Not your everyday Mexican food

"Do many people order the grasshoppers?" a fellow diner quizzed our waitress at Toloache the other night. From her expression it was obvious that the thought of eating insects horrified her. Not everyone is so faint-hearted, apparently, as six orders of the Chapulines (Oaxacan-style dried grasshopper with sauteed onion, jalapeno and lime) had already been served. Five of the six takers loved the unusual dish. "I think the other person just couldn't get past the idea that he was eating grasshoppers," our waitress told us.

We couldn't either, so instead we sampled the house salad (a pillow of seasoned Mexican ricotta layered with a tomato crouton and drizzled with tamarind vinaigrette), organic salmon in a zucchini flower sauce, and chipotle-marinated chicken breast with pinto bean dumplings and pico de gallo.

Toloache (named for a flowering plant in Mexico noted for its use in love potions) is drawing Theater District crowds. They come to sample chef-owner Julian Medina's engaging menu: most of the small plates and tacos are in the \$9 to \$12 range. A party of three or four could share some of these and not even order any main courses. Our favorite dish was a special among the small plates the night we visited. A sprightly open-faced quesadilla topped with hamachi and cactus salad, it's light, colorful and very doable at home. The same couldn't be said of the Chapulines.

By Rosemary Black