



Big Leaf Farm Newsletter Week #11

August 9– August 15, 2009

Farm News

We've been busy in the fields here, planting starts for fall, winter, and spring harvest. In our largest planting to date, we placed over 1500 small plants of cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi, chard, kale, turnips and chicory in the ground on Friday and



Broccoli seedling

Saturday. This cool cloudy weather we've been getting is perfect for setting our new plantings. We'll harvest some of these plantings this fall (Oct-December), and some of them, like overwintering cauliflower and broccoli, will grow throughout the fall, rest during the coldest months, and then resume growth in the spring. They'll be harvested as late as eight months from now, providing

an important harvest during the leanest months on the farm in February, March and April.

We hope you enjoyed the sweet corn in your share last week. There is more this week with even more to come in the future. This 'vegetable', really a fruit, is one of the hallmarks of summer dining, and when eaten lightly boiled or grilled fresh from the field it is hard to beat. This year we sowed five different varieties in succession in order to stretch out the harvest.

Corn was developed by Native Americans thousands of years ago, and grown as a grain (known as field corn), but it wasn't until relatively recently that it has been eaten in the 'milk' stage while still soft and tender. Sweet corn is the result of a single spontaneous mutation in field corn that makes it palatable in the milk stage. The tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy gave the first recorded variety of sweet corn to American settlers in the 1700's.

For several centuries, sweet corn types were bred and maintained as 'open pollinated' varieties. That is, growers and breeders saved the dried kernels from their best ears and replanted them in the following years. However, in the early 20th century, along with the development of other hybrids, breeders found they

could create varieties of corn that were even sweeter and more tender than open pollinated corn types. These hybrids didn't come true from seed, meaning that growers couldn't save a portion of their crop for the following year. And by mid-century, once plant breeders could patent their creations, it became illegal for others to recreate specific proprietary hybrid crosses. Even more recently, the insertion of bacterial genes into corn (and other plants), has led to controversy and has had big impacts on global food production.

I bring up the story of corn because its history is similar to many other vegetables that we consume in our daily lives, and also because we'll be eating lots of sweet corn this week. But I also mention it because all the varieties of corn we are growing this year are those proprietary hybrids created by large multinational seed companies, and bred to be super sweet and tender. This is our first year growing a lot of super-sweet hybrid corn, and we're finding it a little too sweet for our palates. Next year we are thinking of growing a greater variety of sweet corn (including some open pollinated varieties) so that we, and our members, can taste the differences and decide whether using these super-sweet hybrid varieties are really best for our farming system. We'd be interested to hear what you think!

Cast of characters

- **Summer squash**
- **Carrots**
- **Lettuce:** This week's lettuce may look familiar as you've seen it in your box before. It's a red romaine (aka "cos") lettuce, named 'Outredgeous'
- **Cauliflower:** Great in curry or stir fry.
- **Cabbage:** You've seen these dwarf cabbages before: They're called "Gonzalez," and they're small in size but big on cabbage flavor. They are a great way to spice up a salad, or combine with the carrots in coleslaw. Also great cooked in a curry or stir fry.
- **Cucumber:**
- **Sweet Corn:** This week's sweet corn is a hybrid bicolor called Mystique. These ears are smaller than we like, but still plenty tasty.
- **Tomatoes:** We are up to a nice diversity of large tomatoes. The yellow ones are 'yellow zebra'. They're green inside when ripe, so don't wait for them to ripen to a red color.
- **Eggplant:** More globe eggplant. These are wonderful brushed with oil and grilled or broiled to use as a topping for pizza.
- **Sweet Pepper:** These are our first sweet peppers of the summer. They've been hanging on the bushes for

over a month now, and are finally starting to turn distinctly non-green colors. This week we're giving out a combination of red and yellow 'Bell' types. These aren't fully ripe – they'll attain greater sweetness as they ripen more fully. You should see more of these later in the summer.

- **Poblano Pepper:** Also called Pasilla or Ancho when dried, this pepper is mild with just a hint of heat. They are great sautéed with onion and added to beans, or better yet, roasted and peeled and added to any variety of Mexican foods. Identified in your share as the all-green pepper with the pointed tip.
- **Beet greens:** Several members have noted the lack of greens in the summer shares. We hoped chard would fill this slot, but for a variety of reasons, we haven't had enough to go around. These baby beet greens can be cooked as you would chard – you can even try them raw in salad, as they are very tender.

Recipes

For some reason two of this week's three recipes are Mexican-themed, but that's just by chance.

Elote asado (Mexican Grilled Corn)

We haven't tried this recipe yet but plan to soon, what with all this sweet corn around.

- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 3 T sour cream
- 3 T minced fresh cilantro
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¾ t chile powder
- ¼ t ground black pepper
- ¼ t cayenne pepper (optional)
- 4 t lime juice
- ½ cup of Romano or Parmesan cheese
- 4 t vegetable oil
- ¼ t salt
- 6 large ears of corn

While the grill is heating, combine mayonnaise, sour cream, cilantro, garlic, ¼ t chili powder, black pepper,

cayenne, lime juice, and cheese in a large bowl. In a second large bowl combine oil, salt and the remaining ½ t chili. Add the corn and toss lightly to coat with the mixture. Grill the corn until lightly charred on all sides and then coat it with the mayonnaise mixture.

From Cook's illustrated, Sept/Oct 2009.

Calabacitas

- 2-3 cups chopped summer squash.
- ¼ cup butter or margarine
- Corn kernels from two ears of corn
- ½ cup thinly sliced onion
- ½ t salt
- 1 dash pepper
- 1 chopped green chile (your poblano would work perfectly). Optional: you might broil or roast it first and remove the charred skin before chopping.
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup grated cheddar cheese

Sauté squash in butter until soft. Reduce heat and add corn, onions, salt, pepper and green chili. Mix well and add milk. Simmer until well blended and thickened somewhat. Add cheese and cover until cheese is melted.

Cucumber salad

Serve nice and cold from the fridge on a hot day.

- 2-3 cucumbers (1 to 1 ½ lbs)
 - Salt and pepper
 - 2 T rice wine vinegar, or white vinegar, mixed with a little water
 - 1-inch piece of ginger, peeled and minced
 - 1 t sugar
 - 2 T soy sauce, or to taste
 - Fine sprigs of fresh cilantro for garnish
- If you wish, peel and seed the cucumber. If not, just slice it and sprinkle with salt, then allow it to drain in a colander in the sink for 10-20 minutes. Rinse, drain, and pat dry, and place in a bowl with pepper, vinegar, ginger, sugar and soy sauce. Taste and adjust the seasoning before serving.

From 'How to cook everything vegetarian' by Mark Bittman.



Our winter field full of tiny starts for fall, winter and spring harvest.