



# Big Leaf Farm Newsletter Week #20

October 11 – 17, 2009

## Farm News

In a burst of activity we finished getting our fields ready for winter over the last few days. This involved tearing out crops from the summer field and tilling and planting winter cover crops in their place. We finally tilled under our winter squash/pumpkin plot, and seeded it to an oat/vetch cover crop. In the spring we will till this plot and plant it to fruit trees for our orchard.

Our new field is almost an acre – this is a far larger area than we have worked up at once before, so we have been intimidated by the task. Fortunately our ‘new’ tractor has been up to the task. Over the last month we’ve subsoiled, disced and tilled the ground in an attempt to kill the thick sod that has grown there for



many years. We finally finished on Saturday and Sara seeded the plot to several different cover crops. This is too large an area to evenly spread seeds by hand, so we used a chest-mounted broadcast seeder. It has a spinning wheel that throws the seed evenly across the ground. We planted fava beans, crimson clover, Austrian field peas, and the same oat/vetch mix that we sowed in our orchard-to-be, then buried them with the disc. We’re trying a variety of crops to see what works best under our conditions.

Cover crops are used to protect the soil over the winter. Here in the Northwest a significant amount of soil nutrients are lost by leaching out of the topsoil due to heavy rainfall. Remember all those amendments we added to this very field? We want to make sure they’re not lost to leaching over the winter. A cover crop will take up some of those nutrients and hold them through the rainy months. Then we will till them into the soil in the spring and as they break down, this material will release its nutrients and make them available to future

crops. Planting them now with the onset of winter rains means we don’t have to irrigate them to get them to germinate.

## Cast of characters

- **Carrots:**
- **Lettuce:** This week’s lettuce is ‘Speckled Trout Back’. We’ll continue lettuce as long as we can – eventually the rain and the cold makes lettuce rot, but hopefully we’ll make it well into November.
- **Braising mix:** This is a mix of mild asian mustards, perfect for the stir fry pan. You can use these in the place of spinach greens. Some of you might even like them raw. These are just a bigger version of what was in the salad mix several weeks back. They’re large, so chop them lightly before cooking.
- **Tomatoes:** These ripen very slowly on the vine this time of year. Therefore, most of the ones you will receive will benefit from a little further ripening. Just let them sit on your counter for several days and they’ll soften up a little bit and improve in flavor.
- **Potatoes:** This week’s potatoes are small, you might say



finger sized. They are ‘fingerling’ potatoes, and belong to a separate class than the kinds you’ve seen in your share so far. Fingerlings are considered by many chefs to be superior in flavor and texture to standard potatoes.

Because they are so small they are best used in stews and the like where they don’t need to be peeled. They could form the basis of a great winter beef or game stew. These are called ‘Russian Banana’. Most weeks you’ll get potatoes that haven’t been washed, so make sure you rinse them just before you use them. If you want to store them for several days or weeks in a dark cool place, that is fine, just don’t wash them first or you can induce sprouting.

- **Poblano peppers:** These are great for roasting and adding to any variety of dishes, like the cornbread recipe given below. They also make great chile rellenos.

- **Beets –or- Broccoli/Cauliflower:** A switch from last week: O.C. folks get beets and SE Portland people get Broccoli. If we run out of broccoli you might see a cauliflower floret or two here and there.



- **Acorn Squash:** The traditional way to cook this squash is to cut it in half, place the cut sides down on an oiled pan, and bake at 375° for 40-60 minutes, until beginning to soften. If you like them buttery and sweet add some brown sugar and butter and turn them upright for the last 10-15

minutes. Acorn squash are also good stuffed: cook them for 20 minutes or so, then add cheese and rice, vegetables and/or meat and cook until the squash is soft.

• **Pac Choi:** Check out the recipe below that features this tasty vegetable.

## Recipes

### Beets with onions

¾ lb beets  
4 T vegetable oil  
1 t whole cumin seed  
1 clove garlic, peeled and minced  
1 large onion, peeled and coarsely chopped  
1 t plain flour  
1/8- 1/2 t cayenne pepper  
2 medium tomatoes, peeled (if desired) and finely chopped  
1 ¼ cups water

Peel the beets and cut them into wedge. Heat the oil in a pot over a medium flame. When it is hot, cook the cumin seed for 5 seconds, then add the garlic and fry until golden. Put in the onion and cook for 2 more minutes, then add the flour and cayenne. Stir and fry this for 1 minute, then put in the beets, tomatoes, salt, and water and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook on low for 30 minutes or until the beets are tender. Remove the lid, turn up the heat to medium, and cook uncovered for about 7 minutes or until the sauce has thickened slightly. Serve with rice or bread.

*From 'Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cooking'.*

### Green Chili and Cheese Corn Bread

*Here's a great basic cornbread recipe, made even better with cheese and green chile. The chilis add very little perceptible heat to the cornbread. If you have extra diced chiles, save them to cook in eggs.*

1-2 Poblano peppers, roasted, skinned, and diced  
2 T butter  
1 cup cornmeal  
1 cup all-purpose or whole-wheat pastry flour  
½ t salt  
2 t baking powder  
2 eggs  
¼ cup butter, melted  
2-4 T honey to taste  
1 cup milk  
½ cup grated jack or pepper jack cheese  
¼ cup or more diced roasted green chile.

Ahead of time roast the poblano whole under the broiler. As soon as it blisters and begins to blacken turn

it over. When done remove from oven to cool, then scrape the skin off, open and remove seeds, and chop into small pieces and place out of way in bowl.

Preheat the oven to 425°. Put the butter in an 8-inch square baking pan or an 8-inch cast iron skillet into the oven to melt the butter while the oven heats. Mix the dry ingredients in a mixing bowl and make a well in the center. Mix the wet ingredients in another small bowl. When the butter is melted remove the skillet from the stove and coat with the butter, pouring off any excess into the wet ingredients. Mix the wet and dry ingredients with a few swift strokes, add the cheese and chile and mix again, then pour into the pan and bake in the middle of the oven until golden brown on top ~25 minutes. When done it should pull away slightly from the edge of the pan. Best served hot right from the pan.

*From 'Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone' by Deborah Madison*

### Stir-fried Pac Choi with Roasted Peanuts

*Here's a great stir-fry that highlights the tastiness of pac choy. When we make this we usually at least double the amount of peanuts because we like the dish with extra nuts.*

3 T raw peanuts  
¼ t red pepper flakes  
Salt  
1 ½ lbs pac choy  
2 T peanut oil  
4 garlic cloves, minced  
4 t minced ginger  
2 T soy sauce  
1 t cornstarch mixed with 3 T soup stock or water  
1 t roasted peanut oil or regular peanut oil

Dry roast the peanuts in a hot cast iron skillet or other heavy pot until they turn fragrant with dark brown spots. Chop with the pepper flakes and a few pinches of salt and set aside.

Slice off the pac choy stems and cut them into 1-inch pieces, leaving the leaves whole. Set a wok (best) or skillet over high heat, and allow it to heat before adding the oil. Allow the oil to heat briefly, then add the garlic and ginger and stir fry for ~ 1 minute. Add the pac choy and a little salt and cook until wilted and glossy. Add the soy sauce and cornstarch and stir-fry for 1 or 2 minutes more until the leaves are shiny and glazed. Add the roasted peanuts, toss, and serve.

*From 'Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone' by Deborah Madison*



*For a variety of reasons we don't save a lot of seeds here at the farm, although this is something we plan to learn more about in future years. Exceptions to this are bean and pea seeds -their biology makes them particularly easy to save. Here are some pole bean seeds that we'll use to plant next year's crop.*