

# Big Leaf Farm Newsletter Week #24 Nov. 8-14, 2009

## Farm News

This week's share really looks like a good one - we've got a lot of tasty winter vegetables for you. Because this is the last week of our regular season we're throwing in a few extras, including some new and perhaps unfamiliar items. Don't worry if you are feeling overburdened - most of the items will keep fine for at least a couple of weeks, especially the squash and root vegetables. There is no reason you can't cook much of this stuff up for thanksgiving dinner. Store the squash in a cool place that won't freeze, like your garage (although your kitchen counter will work fine for a week or two), and the root vegetables in a plastic bag in your fridge.

Since the surveys are still trickling in, I thought this would be a good opportunity to present a quick self assessment of the season.

As you all know this was our first season growing commercially, and what a roller coaster ride it has been. We really struggled last spring, as we came to terms with the weather in an unusually cold wet spring. We battled slugs and flea beetle attacks and started sending out shares later than we would have liked in early June.

In late spring we discovered our symphytan problems, something we dealt with for the rest of the season, and by this point it was too late for most of our early season brassicas - as a result we had far less early cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower than we would have liked, resulting in a couple of lean weeks.

Our garlic struggled, and we agonized over its decline. Soil tests revealed that we hadn't taken our acid soils seriously enough. We learned to lime the heck out of our new field for winter that we tilled up in mid summer. In retrospect many of our pest problems are likely due to soil nutrient deficiencies. As a result, we spent a pretty penny on mineral amendments for our new field for next year that we broke up with our new used tractor this fall.

Our early tomatoes did great, and we were proud of the fact that we were eating juicy red fruit before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Our main season tomato production was good, but only about half of the varieties did well. Again, we blame our lack of good soil fertility. Fortunately we overplanted tomatoes so we had enough to go around. Some weeks we put 6 lbs of tomatoes in the large shares!

Carrots did very well but our corn crop struggled and ears were on the small side while potatoes, lettuce,

bush beans, kohlrabi, peppers, onions, and fall broccoli and cabbages have performed nicely. We are still struggling with rotting in our fall cauliflower - possibly a result of low boron levels in our soil. One of the disadvantages of this farming thing is that you only get one or at most two tries a season. If something fails you've got a whole year to think about it and try it again...

We've learned an awful lot about farming in our first year, but the most important lesson we're taking away is how much fun it is to get to know those that eat our food. After talking to other CSA farmers last winter, we weren't sure what to expect from our members. We feel like we've been graced to have such an accommodating membership who were willing to ride the roller coaster with us this season. We can't thank all of you enough for putting your trust in us this year. You've truly made it all possible.

If you are staying on with us through the winter, we look forward to seeing you for another couple months. If you are interested in signing up for next year, please look for an email from us in the next three weeks that will explain the sign-up timeline.

We hope everyone has an opportunity to enjoy a bountiful thanksgiving meal. May your plates be graced with lots of tasty vegetables!

## Cast of characters

- **Carrots:**
- **Ambercup squash:** This tasty orange squash is a koboche type. It has dryer flesh than other winter squash, so it is great steamed or cooked in soups. Check out the recipe below for a stellar squash soup recipe.
- **Dinosaur Kale:** The kale plants are gaining some nice color what with this cooler weather. They're getting a little more flavorful too.
- **Broccoli:**
- **Leeks:**
- **Chicory:** Superficially this looks like lettuce, but if you taste it raw you'll realize otherwise. This is a leaf-type chicory, in contrast to the more familiar red-leafed chicory, radicchio, that forms a tall tight head. Leaf chicories are bitter just like radicchio, and while they can be eaten raw in a salad, we think they are best cooked. If you are familiar with escarole then you'll have ideas for cooking this one - although that is a difference species, the two are similar in their flavor and use. If you are unfamiliar with this vegetable you should taste it raw. Compare the taste of the blanched inner leaves with the outer greener red-flecked leaves. There a wonderful recipe with this cooked green given below.
- **Yacón:** Here's a new one for most of you. This vegetable is a root, and looks like a sweet potato, but it is best treated as a fruit for eating. Crisp and sweet, reminiscent somewhat of Jicama, Yacón is a member of the sunflower family. Grown for centuries in South America, Yacón is only recently gaining interest here in the U.S. Although the flesh is sweet, much of the sweetness is derived from an undigestible sugar, which makes it very low in calories. Try Yacón raw in fruit salad or with your yogurt in the morning. They're also great fried in a little

butter – the sugar caramelizes and they are really tasty. You can store them in the fridge, if left out on the counter they may sweeten. Don't be worry if they shrivel a bit. Apparently that is how they are sold in South America.

• **Brussels sprouts:** A vegetable many people love to hate, Brussels sprouts need to be better appreciated. Did you know that overcooked Brussels sprouts release glucosinolate sinigrin which has a sulfur-like taste and smell? I suspect this is why many don't like this vegetable, so if this includes you, please give these a try. Boiling or steaming for 5-7 minutes is plenty of cooking. If you cut them in half they cook much faster. Our favorite way is to first lightly steam or boil and then fry in butter and herbs lightly. These aren't the prettiest Brussels you've ever seen. You can trim them like a miniature cabbage by removing the outer leaves: Just cut off a bit of the base and remove the leaves.

• **Parsnips:** A relative of carrots, parsnips are generally cooked before they are eaten. They are great used as carrots in roasted dishes, soups, and stews. Parsnips, as traditionally grown in places where the ground freezes are left in the garden all winter and harvested in the spring for a much needed spring crop. Here in the Northwest we can harvest them all winter – we wait until after the first few frosts because the cold weather sweetens them up. Check out the breakfast parsnip recipe below.

• **Rutabegas:** This root is not seen too much these days, and that's a real shame. This vegetable is great roasted along with potatoes, beets, squash and parsnips in the oven. It can also be cooked with potatoes and mashed right along with them in the pot. You can make some nice rutabaga fries by peeling and slicing them into long batons, soaking in water for 30 minutes, patting dry with a towel, and spread on an oiled sheet and baked at 400° for 30-40 minutes, turning occasionally. When done toss them with minced rosemary, salt, and black pepper. Rutabegas will last for many weeks in your fridge if they don't dry out.

## Recipes

### Chicory risotto

*The last time we made this we didn't have any risotto, so we used standard medium grain white rice, which worked OK. Risotto rice has a firmer texture, so if you substitute with plain rice, the shorter grain the better.*

4 T olive oil  
1 medium onion (or leeks)  
1 ½ cups Arborio rice.  
1 head chicory, cut into long slices  
salt and pepper  
parmesan cheese  
1 cup white wine or pale ale beer  
~ 5 cups vegetable broth

Wash the chicory and drip or spin dry. Cut off the base of the plant and then slice across the plant, creating long thin ribbons, including both the tough outer leaves and tender blanched inner ones. Saute the onion in the oil until translucent, then add the rice and stir until coated. Then add

the beer or wine and stir until it is absorbed. Start adding small amounts of the broth, and allow it to cook in each time. After 8-12 minutes, add ¾ of the chicory. Stir it in and continue adding the broth until the rice is tender. At this point season with salt and pepper and add the remaining chicory and a healthy dose of parmesan cheese and stir in. Serve immediately.

### Eliot's breakfast parsnips

*Here's an new take on parsnips. When you taste this you won't believe how good it is. This recipe is originally from Eliot Coleman, the master organic grower.*

3 T unsalted butter  
1 lb parsnips, peeled and sliced into thin rounds  
½ cup toasted chopped walnuts or pecans  
warm maple syrup

Melt the butter and gently cook the parsnips rounds until they caramelize in the heat. This should take from 7-10 minutes. Then serve with the nuts and maple syrup. Out of this world!

*From "Vegetarian cooking for everyone" by Deborah Madison*

### Thai Tofu and Winter Squash Stew

*This is a wonderful recipe that highlights the flavor of the kabocha squash. Seems like chicken would make a nice substitute for the tofu, although we haven't tried this...*

2-3 medium leeks, about 6 ounces  
2 T peanut oil  
2 garlic cloves, finely minced  
1 serrano or jalapeño pepper, seeded and diced  
1 T finely chopped ginger root  
1 T curry powder  
1 t light brown sugar  
3 T soy sauce  
1 15 ounce can unsweetened coconut milk  
1 ½ lbs kabocha or amercup squash, peeled and cut into ½ inch cubes  
salt to taste  
1 10 ounce package tofu (recipe calls for silken, but we always use firm, because that's what we have). Cut into ½ inch cubes.  
Juice of 1 lime  
1/3 cup raw peanuts  
¼ cup cilantro

Dice the leeks, keeping an eye out for dirt inside. If there is some dirt inside you can cut them in half and soak in water to remove. Heat the oil in a large pot and cook the leeks until partially soft, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic, chiles, and ginger and cook for a few minutes, then add the curry, sugar, and soy sauce. Scrape the pan, then add 3 cups water, the coconut milk, squash and a little salt. Bring to a boil then simmer for 15 minutes. Then add the tofu and simmer until the squash is done. Taste for salt and add the lime juice to taste. While the soup is cooking you can toast the peanuts in a dry pan. Serve the soup over rice with the cilantro and peanuts on top.

As an alternative, you can fry the tofu first in some peanut oil until it is golden brown, and then add to the soup.

*From "Vegetarian cooking for everyone" by Deborah Madison*