

Big Leaf Farm Newsletter Week #4: June 21-June 27, 2009

Farm News

Spring is releasing her grip slowly, and despite short spells of warm sunny weather, we are still contending with colder, less sunny conditions than normal. This means slower than normal growth in our plantings that leaves them more susceptible to invertebrate pests.

And we have been battling some pests this spring. It has been our experience that early on in a new gardening location pests outbreaks are common. The first year pest pressure is low, but by the second year pests drawn in on year one increase rapidly in number and have strong effects. In later years, as beneficial insects increase in numbers, and plants become healthier due to increased tillage and better soil chemistry, pest pressure is reduced. Right now we're hoping this theory is correct and future years will see reduced pest pressure.

This spring we've been dealing with pests such as flea beetle, aphids and cabbage worms. As we mentioned earlier, we've found that covering plants with a thin agricultural fabric prevents access by these pests and increases plant growth by raising the temperature and humidity around plants.

We're also dealing with a more insidious pest, one that can't be excluded with row covers, because this one, the symphylan, lives underground and feeds on organic matter and the new roots of growing vegetables. Symphylans appear in the Northwest in ground that has been worked and irrigated for several years, and there is no way to eliminate them or reduce their effects on a large scale in an organic system other than allowing land to fallow in grass for 2-3 years. We're finding that almost 1/4 of our main field is infested with symphylans, making growing almost anything on that ground impossible. Fortunately, we noticed this relatively early and, because we have some extra room, we can move things around and plant the most susceptible crops (such as direct-seeded beets and



cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower starts), in areas that are free of symphylans. The presence of this pest in our fields means we'll have to break new ground this fall and plant all of next year's crops there, while planting our currently-used ground in grasses for several years. This pest is one reason why the management of permanently established greenhouses are challenging here in the northwest, and we are working on a plan for some moveable greenhouses that we'll hopefully be able to implement next year.

On a different note, several of you have asked if we'll recycle used egg cartons, plastic bags, or twist ties. You'll also be receiving some of the paper berry cartons this year that you might want to recycle. Unfortunately, due to food safety concerns, we can't reuse items like bags or twist ties, and berry pints, although there is no reason why you can't reuse them in your own kitchen. We have plenty of egg cartons, and once we start selling eggs, you can return any cartons you get from us. We welcome any suggestions from our members in ways we can reduce waste.



Finally, eggs are in! We'll start selling eggs with next week's delivery. They're a bit on the small side still, so we'll charge a reduced price at first (they will normally \$5.00/dozen). If you want to order eggs please send us an email (chris@bigleafaffarm.com) and we'll bring them to the pick-up next week. We're not sure what the demand from our members is, but we're hoping that by the time we are up to full production in about a month or so, everyone who wants eggs will be able to get some. Until then, we'll give priority to those who email us first.

Cast of characters

- **Spinach:** Spinach is at its best during the cooler months, so our spinach season is now winding down. This versatile green is good both raw and cooked. A native from central and southwestern Asia, this leafy green plant contains high levels of iron and calcium (although these are less accessible to your body than they are in some other foods), vitamin C, riboflavin, vitamin A, folate, magnesium, potassium, and vitamins E, B6, and thiamin. So eat your spinach! We really enjoy spinach cooked into pasta sauce or as a topping for pizza. See below for a very simple spinach recipe.
- **Turnips:** This is the last of the turnips for this spring. The roots and greens can be cooked together. Although we haven't tried it, the braising

method in this week's kohlrabi recipe should work just as well on turnips and their greens.

- **Scallions:** Great cooked into stir-fry or raw on salad.
- **Garlic Scapes:** The last of the garlic scapes. Cured garlic bulbs will be coming in a month or so.
- **Leaf Lettuce:** We have a mix of red and green leaf lettuce this week. We're trying a new way to deal with leaf lettuce, which involves cooling them in water post-harvest and spinning them dry in a repurposed washing machine. Hopefully this will get them to you in better shape than last week.
- **Kohlrabi:** More kohlrabi is available in this week's share. We continue to be amazed at the variety of ways this unusual vegetable can be prepared. This weekend we tried a new recipe for braised kohlrabi and were very pleased. You can find it in the recipes section.
- **Cherries:** We weren't sure what to expect from our cherry trees this year, given that we got little to no fruit last year. Fortunately, we've got enough to give everyone a taste.

Recipes

Braised kohlrabi with greens.

We were blown away with the simplicity and tastiness of this recipe. This is a great way to introduce the uninitiated to the beauty, complexity and tastiness of kohlrabi. Cooking the greens in liquid for 10-15 minutes makes them very tender.

1 kohlrabi, with greens.
1-2 T butter
1/4 cup water or vegetable stock
grated parmesan and/or fresh herbs.

Cut leaves from the kohlrabi bulb, remove the exposed stem and the thickest part of the stem in the leaf. You can do this quickly by folding the leaf in half and cutting along the stem with a pair of scissors. Stack the leaves, roll them up, and then chop them into ribbons, or smaller if you prefer. Peel and slice the bulb into julienne strips.

Melt the butter in a heavy skillet or pan, and toss in greens and juliennes, stirring to coat with the fat. Add the liquid and cover, simmering the greens gently for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the lid and raise the heat to medium-high, allowing the liquid to evaporate and the greens and juliennes to brown. Serve with a sprinkling of finely grated parmesan and/or finely diced fresh herbs such as thyme, rosemary, or oregano.

1 minute spinach

This simple garlic recipe yields a simple side dish that highlights the tastiness of spinach

1/2 to 1 lb fresh spinach leaves
3-4 T vegetable broth or water
Salt, to taste
Garlic, minced or crushed, 1 clove.
Extra-virgin olive oil or a roasted nut or seed oil like toasted sesame seed oil.

Place the spinach in a colander and rinse well. Shake to remove most (but not all) of the water. Place the broth or water in a medium sized microwave safe bowl (if using a microwave) or pot (if using the stove), and cover. Microwave on high for 1 minute or cook on the stove over medium high heat, until the spinach is wilted. Remove from the heat and season to taste with a little salt and a touch of garlic. Finish with a drizzle of the oil and serve hot, warm, or at room temperature. *Adapted from "The vegetable dishes I can't live without" by Mollie Katzen.*

Coming soon to a table near you...

- **Baby carrots:** We promised carrots this week, but decided to wait one more week to let them size up a little bit more. You'll see them next week.
- **New potatoes:** Our potato plants are just finishing up flowering indicating that they are ready for harvest. Here is the first harvest, a mix of Yukon gold and Cranberry red.

