

# Big Leaf Farm Newsletter Week #5: June 28-July 4, 2009

## Farm News

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July! Things are really picking up here at the farm. We left for a couple of days this last weekend, and when we returned we noticed that all our plants were quite a bit bigger.

We made the trek into Portland last week to see a new movie. "Food, Inc." explores the politics, economics, and social aspects of food. If you are interested in these topics, you might have read Michael Pollen's recent book, "The Omnivore's Dilemma". If so, the content of 'Food, Inc.' explores familiar terrain. If you're not familiar with these topics, this movie provides some startling and graphic images of how much of America's food is created and processed. We consider ourselves pretty well-informed on these issues; however, we left the movie theater a bit shaken up and a little disturbed by the graphic nature of the movie. However, we also left feeling even better about what we are trying to do at the farm and grateful for our members for making it possible. So, while books and movies concerning the food issues of our nation can be disturbing, running a farm and interacting with our members leaves us full of optimism for the future.

## Cast of characters

- **Baby beets:** Several folks remarked on the baby beets a few weeks back. Here are some more; enjoy them as these are the last for a while. Later in the summer we'll have some full sized beets for everyone.
- **Sweet Onions:** These sweet 'Walla Walla' onions were seeded last fall and allowed to over-winter outside. They started growing rapidly in the spring and, as normal, are sizing up well before the fall storage onion crop. We're giving these out with their greens attached which can be used like the tops of scallions. The bulb itself is very mild and sweet. They're used to best effect in a dish that calls for raw onions, but



cooked, taste similar to the more common storage onion. Store these in the fridge until you use them.

- **Leaf Lettuce:** This week we have some red lettuce for your salads. They are called "Mascara" (the oak-leafed one) and "Outredgeous". We're noticing that red-leafed types grow slower than their green-leafed cousins, so these heads aren't as big as they could be.
- **Fennel bulb:** Also known as 'anise', 'finocchio', or 'Florence fennel', this vegetable is a pale green bulb that forms above ground at the base of the plant. Fennel makes an interested substitute for celery, but with a different, soft, anise flavor. Fennel bulb can be prepared any number of ways: braised, baked, steamed, sautéed, or grilled. It is also great salad fare, served raw when bulbs are small like the ones you are receiving this week. You can use the lacy leaves for garnish or seasoning. The stalks can be used along with the bulb, but taste them first, as sometimes they can be stringy (especially on larger bulbs). Check out the fennel salad recipe below.
- **Baby Carrots:** We have just a taste of baby carrots for you this week. In 2-3 weeks full-sized carrots will become a staple in your share, but for now enjoy these sweet baby carrots.
- **New potatoes:** We eat a lot of potatoes here at the farm, and since our storage potatoes ran out in April we've been going without for a while... which makes these new potatoes even tastier! We planted these 'Yukon Gold' and 'Cranberry Red' potatoes on Saint Patrick's Day this year. Here's



one of our helpers performing this annual rite. New potatoes are harvested early, while the above-ground plant is still living, so they are very tender,

with soft, thin skins. They can be used in any recipe that calls for potatoes, but we suggest a recipe that highlights their individual flavor. New potatoes are traditionally oven-roasted or added to stews. Check out a simple recipe below for roasted potatoes. Because of their tender skins, we haven't tried to get all the dirt off, so wash carefully (and gently) before you use. They are best stored on the counter. If you refrigerate them, the starch can turn to sugar after a couple of days and they can become unpalatably sweet. These won't keep like normal storage potatoes, so eat them soon! Don't be alarmed; the red ones are supposed to be red inside too.

- **Cherries:** These are the last of our 'Rainier' cherries for the year. The birds seem to be staying away this year, which leaves more for humans to enjoy.

## Recipes

### Oven roasted potatoes

*These can be prepared with or without the skins. Potatoes are almost pure starch – except for the skins. Keeping them on allows you to get many extra nutrients – vitamins and antioxidants are present in the skin, as well as fiber, which mediates the blood-sugar spiking effects of eating so much starch at once.*

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Wipe a large baking sheet or roasting pan generously with an oil of your choice (olive or grape-seed oil works well). Wash 1-2 lbs of potatoes, and cube into equal sized chunks, peeling them first if you wish. Put them in the pan and drizzle with a little extra oil. Add salt and pepper to taste. Rosemary, dried or fresh is also nice. Toss until oil is well distributed, and spread out on the pan one layer thick. Roast undisturbed for 20 minutes, then turn. Check every 10 minutes thereafter, turning with a spatula, until they are crusty and crunchy on the outside and tender on the inside.

### Fennel salad with oil and lemon

Trim 1-2 small fennel bulbs, reserving some of the leafy tops. Slice the bulbs paper thin (using a mandolin or box grater helps) and toss with a little bit of salt, then with extra virgin olive oil to coat lightly. Squeeze on a little lemon juice (or add a little bottled lemon juice) and taste. Season with pepper if you wish and serve with a garnish of finely chopped fennel greens.

*Adapted from 'Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone' by Deborah Madison*

## Potato-Fennel gratin

*As of this writing we haven't tried this recipe yet, but it looks like a good one, and it combines two of this week's vegetables. With a green salad this could make quite a meal.*

2-3 cups heavy cream, half-and-half, or milk  
 1 1/2 lb potatoes, peeled or not, very thinly sliced  
 1 – 2 fennel bulbs trimmed and sliced like the potatoes  
 3/4 cup chopped hazelnuts or almonds  
 3/4 cup bread crumbs  
 1/2 cup Gruyère or other sharp cheese (optional)

Preheat oven to 375 and heat the milk or cream on the stove top until hot. Layer the potatoes and fennel bulb in an oven proof dish, sprinkling each layer with salt and pepper. Pour hot cream or milk to fill the dish with potatoes and fennel about 3/4 of the way. Sprinkle the top with the chopped nut/bread crumb mixture, and cheese if you are using it. Bake for 45-50 minutes, until the top is brown and the potatoes are very soft. Enjoy!

*Adapted from "How to cook everything vegetarian" by Mark Bittman.*

## Coming soon to a table near you...

- **Tomatoes?!** By the calendar, the first day of summer has come and gone, but for us, the first day of summer coincides with our first vine ripened tomato, picked warm and eaten on the spot out of hand. We've had a few of those already here at the farm, and we're hoping to have enough by next week for everyone to have a least a taste. Main tomato season is still 3-4 weeks away... Here are some unripe 'Red Zebra' tomatoes that still have a way to go.

