



Big Leaf Farm Newsletter Week #7: July 12 – July 18 2009

Farm News

Hold onto your hats, because here come some summer goodies! We have quite a diversity of offerings this week, as many of our summer vegetables are coming into production.

We take Sunday off as a rest day and try not think too much about farming, other than chores that can't be delayed like watering starts in the greenhouse and caring for chickens. However, the one important task we complete is a tour of our fields and greenhouse at the end of the day to assess those items that are ready to be sent out in the shares the following week. We've found that starting our week with this task keeps us from constantly agonizing (to some degree) about whether we will have enough to fill the boxes. This tour also allows the two of us to compare notes about what we are seeing, identify tasks for the following week, and discuss problems we are seeing.

However during this week's tour we forgot about all our problems as we noticed the summer vegetables ripening that we hadn't noticed earlier- beans, eggplant, squash and cucumbers in large enough quantities to send out to at least a portion of our members. We hope you enjoy the diversity you'll find in your share this week.

On an unrelated note, there was an article in last week's Oregonian FOODday, comparing the prices of produce from different sources- the grocery store, farmers market, and CSA. In short, the author found that same amount of vegetables were cheapest at Winco (\$17.83), and most expensive at the Portland Farmer's market and New Seasons market (\$28.19 and \$28.20, respectively). We were gratified to see that an unnamed CSA price came in right in the middle at \$21.60. If you didn't see the article you can check it out online at the Oregonian's website.

Clearly, vegetables locally grown without artificial chemicals are superior than those found at Winco, and we are glad you agree with us that it is worth spending more for those items. We are just glad that the CSA model facilitates the direct marketing of produce to consumers in a way that can save them money over the farmer's market in their support of local agriculture.

Finally, a third unrelated note: Some of the items listed below are notated with the word (rotation). This means that we didn't have enough this week to give enough out to everyone, so we are splitting things up. If you don't see them this week you'll get them in the next week or two.

Cast of characters

- **Sweet Onions:** More sweet onions. We're giving out fewer of them because we have so many other items. That means you'll see them for several more weeks in your share.
- **Fennel bulb:** This week sees the last of the fennel bulb. We started another flat of seeds on Monday, so you'll see this item in your share again in 75-80 days!
- **Leaf Lettuce:** We apologize for the size of your lettuce this week. We're calling them 'teenage heads' because they're somewhere between baby and full grown. We planned on full size heads every week until salad mix returns in the fall, but we hit a hitch in this plan this week. Look for larger heads next week. By the way, this variety is 'flashy trout back' that you saw in your salad mix earlier this spring.
- **Carrots:** Our carrots are sizing up nicely, but aren't up to full size yet. We thinned them out to allow the remaining ones room to grow into, and we are giving out the thinnings this week for you to taste.
- **Tomatoes:** More of the same from last week, our early hybrid tomatoes are pumping out the ripe red fruit. We're serving them by the bowlful at meals, and loving every second of it! Meanwhile, our larger main-season hybrid tomatoes and heirloom varieties are sizing up nicely and starting to turn distinctly non-green colors...
- **Cherry tomatoes (rotation):** Cherry tomatoes are starting to come in to production. Here's a taste for half of our members. The other half will get cherry tomatoes in a week or two.
- **Summer squash:** This yellow squash is great raw in salads, on pizza, or cooked into stews and casseroles. Mighty yummy.
- **Cucumbers:** These little guys are called 'Boothby blonde' after the Boothby family of Livermore Maine that maintained this heirloom variety for many generations. The skin is extremely tender, so no need to peel it. You can rub the small spines off when you wash it. They are great in a salad, if they can make it there. We love eating these, sliced, out of hand.

- **Eggplant (rotation):** On rotation because we don't have enough for everybody this week. If you don't see these in your share you'll get them in the next week or two, we promise! These globe eggplants are called 'Dusky' and they are a sight to behold. So purple and glossy! The classic preparation for eggplant is eggplant parmesan, of which you can find a good recipe in almost any cookbook. For other options, see the recipe section below.
- **Green Beans (rotation):** These are the first of the bush beans. We planted them to tide us over until our pole beans come into production, and boy to we wish we had planted way more. This heirloom is called 'Dragon Langerie' or 'Dragon's Tongue'. With a unique purple streaking, it has superb flavor and crunch. The big pods don't lose their tenderness – this one is a real winner. For us these have a hard time making it into the pot, they are so good raw, but they are great steamed. Steam them until they are just barely tender. The purple streaks go away when you cook them.
- **Cabbage (rotation):** This is the first of our spring cabbage. It's tender and sweet, and great raw in salads and slaws. See a simple cooked preparation in the recipe section. This is a dwarf version called 'Gonzales' but it hasn't been too speedy for us. It's not sizing up uniformly, so we are picking the larger ones this week with the rest to follow for next week.
- **Broccoli (rotation):** Like our cabbage, our broccoli plantings were somewhat stunted by less than ideal growing conditions and so have staggered maturity. We are harvesting what we can this week, as the heads don't hold long in the field, especially in the heat. Those that don't get broccoli this week will get some soon.

Recipes

Bruschetta with grilled Eggplant and Tomato

4 Asian eggplant, or 1/3- 1/2 globe eggplant
 Olive oil
 Bread of your choice (heavy crusted French sourdough would be nice)
 Salt and pepper
 1/2 cup crumbled goat cheese or feta or grated mozzarella
 2 tsp chopped marjoram or thyme (or 1/2 tsp dried)
 2 ripe tomatoes, seeded and finely diced
 Red wine vinegar to taste

Cut the eggplant into bread-sized appropriate sizes about 3/8 inch thick. We like to leave the skin on, but remove it if you prefer (remember there are lots of good nutrients in the skin). Score one side of each piece with a knife to allow the heat to penetrate the flesh. Brush both sides with oil and grill or place under the broiler for 7-10 minutes on each side until tender. The eggplant should be soft and brown at this point. Toast the bread, and cover with the eggplant pieces, season with salt and pepper, and cover with the cheese. Broil until the cheese starts to bubble (about 7 min) then remove to individual plates and sprinkle with the herb/tomato mixture. Finish with a few drops of vinegar if you wish.

Adapted from 'Vegetarian cooking for everyone' by Deborah Madison.

Buttered Cabbage

Here's a very simple cabbage preparation. Want to add another vegetable from your share? We haven't tried it, but you might add your fennel bulb, thinly sliced, to the cabbage before cooking. If you do, and it's good, let us know!

Trim one cabbage and cut in half and core. Cut the halves into quarters and slice thin, and place in a pan with a large chunk of butter, salt to taste, and 1/2 inch of water. Bring to a boil, then cover the pan and simmer until the cabbage is tender. Taste for salt and butter and adjust as needed. *Inspire by a preparation described by Alice Waters in her wonderful book 'The Art of Simple Food'*

Sautéed eggplant with tomatoes

This is a nice recipe that combines three of this week's vegetables. Don't be afraid to throw in some squash and broccoli as well. This would go great on rice, pasta, or even better on a grain such as bulgur, millet or quinoa.

Eggplant, cubed or sliced. Peel if you wish.

1 onion
 1 1/2 - 2 cups chopped tomatoes
 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil, more or less
 1 T minced garlic
 Black pepper
 Parsley leaves for garnish (optional).

Cut the eggplant and put the olive oil and most of the garlic (reserve 1 tsp) and the onion in a large deep skillet and cook for 2 minutes, then add the eggplant and cook on medium low heat for 15-30 minutes or until the eggplant is very tender. Add the diced fresh tomatoes when the eggplant is almost done, and continue to cook for 10 minutes, or until the tomato breaks up. Add the remaining garlic for the last five minutes of cooking, and garnish with the parsley.