



Big Leaf Farm

Winter Season 2009-10

Week#1

Farm News

This colder than normal weather prompted a flurry of activity late last week. Late last week we noticed that it wasn't going to get above freezing for several days, so we decided to harvest all of this week's produce early. Everything in our fields isn't damaged by temperatures in the 20's, however, they can't be harvested while the air temperature is below freezing. It's difficult to get roots out of the ground when it is frozen, and greens, like kale and collard greens, while they don't mind some frosty weather, generally don't like to be picked when their leaves are frozen. So starting mid-day on Saturday once everything was thawed, we rushed to harvest everything for this week's share. We also spent some time covering several beds with a thin fabric called 'row cover'. This prevents frost damage on some of the roots vegetables if the temperature gets much below 20°.

This is the first winter we have grown enough produce for commercial production, and it is interesting to see how different plants respond to the cold weather. Many plants wilt, like these asian mustards. By removing most of the water in their stems and leaves, they prevent the expansion damage that freezing water can cause to plants cells. If it doesn't get too cold, these crops will bounce back after a cold snap.



Other vegetables are unfazed by the cold weather, and can withstand temperatures colder than the high teens and low 20's we

have been experiencing. For example, this savoy cabbage is unfazed by the frost. Our kale plants look the same – in a field of wilted plants they stand tall and proud in defiance of the cold weather.



This cold weather got us thinking about what we would do in a weather emergency, in the event that we are unable to harvest due to the cold weather or if icy conditions precluded road travel. Remember last year's unusual storm when crops and roads were buried under

over a foot of snow and ice? We've decided that the best option is for me to contact everyone Sunday if a delivery is impossible the following day. To do that, I'd like to determine if phone or email is the best way to reach people. I'll be asking at the pickup – if I forgot to ask you or if you get your produce at the farm please let me know if you have a preference.

One final piece of business: We're already starting to think about next season, and we know other folks are too. If you are currently a member you are assured a spot next year. You'll receive an email in a couple of weeks that will outline the details for next year and tell you how you can sign up. You'll have until at least mid January. If you have a friend that would like to become a member have them contact us as soon as possible. The sooner folks get added to our list the better chance they have to secure a spot.

Cast of characters

- **Arugula:** This slightly spicy flavorful green is great raw, cooking it removes the heat. Use it like spinach or mustard greens in the pot. Like spinach it contains some dirt, so please wash it before eating. This is best done by immersing it in 1-2 changes of water and swirling it in the water to remove all clinging soil. This arugula is probably best eaten early in the week– it actually got a little frosted after we picked it, so I'm not sure how long it will stand up over time in your fridge. Store it in a plastic bag.
- **Carrots:** Watch out for small blemishes on the carrots – this damage from the carrot rust fly is easily removed when you prepare them. These carrots are great for cooking, but if you enjoy raw carrots you are in for a treat. These frost-sweetened carrots are very tasty.
- **Collard greens:** This hearty green can be prepared like other sturdy greens such as kale and turnip greens. Because it's on the robust end of the scale, it takes longer to cook. It's great chopped and added to stir fries. For a new twist on mashed potatoes you can chop it finely and add to the potato water when cooking mashed potatoes. When the potatoes are done, mash the greens right into the potatoes. Store these in a plastic bag in your fridge.
- **Beets:** Winter beets are great roasted, and they cook faster if you cut them first – check out the recipe below
- **Celeriac:** Otherwise known as celery root, this vegetable is not as starchy as other root vegetables, so it doesn't lead to spikes in blood sugar like eating potatoes does. Celeriac is great sliced thin and pan fried (it doesn't absorb much fat when cooking, also unlike other vegetables). We like it best cooked and mashed along with potatoes, and this is the easiest way to prepare it. Celeriac cooks a little slower than potatoes, so cut it a little smaller than the potatoes when you add everything to the pot.
- **Onions:** We were unable to harvest leeks before the cold weather set in, so you are receiving yellow storage onions instead. These will store for weeks in a cool place. We'll send out leeks once the ground warms a little bit.
- **Potatoes:** This week's potatoes are Russet Burbank. Discovered by the famous plant breeder Luther Burbank, this potato originally

had a smooth white skin. Several decades later a Burbank potato plant produced a 'sport' or mutated potato that became the preferred type, mostly because the russeted version is resistant to late blight, the disease that caused the Irish potato famine. The rest is history. Every time you eat a French fry you are likely consuming this variety. These are great baked, mashed, or roasted as home fries.

Recipes

Roasted beets and goat cheese gratin

1 ½ - 2 lbs beets
1 T butter or olive oil
Salt and pepper
1 cup crumbled goat cheese
¼ cup bread crumbs
up to ¼ cup chopped fresh thyme.

Peel the beets, removing any blemishes, and then cut them into thin slices. Toss with a little oil and roast in a 350-375° oven for 30-50 minutes, turning often with a spatula, until they are tender. When the beets are done, place them in a casserole dish, cover with the cheese and sprinkle with the bread crumbs, then broil for 3-5 minutes until the cheese is melted and golden. Finish by sprinkling with the thyme.

From 'How to cook everything vegetarian' by Mark Bittman

Braised collard greens

This simple preparation is my favorite recipe for collard greens

1 bunch collard greens
Salt
1-2 T butter
½ onion, diced
1 garlic clove, sliced
¼ - ½ t red pepper flakes

Drop the collard greens into a large pot of boiling water and cook for 10 minutes. You can stem/chop them first or leave them whole. Once they are done, reserve ½ cup of the cooking liquid, then drain them from the water and set aside. Heat the butter in a heavy skillet and add the onion and garlic, cooking until the onion is soft. Add the greens along with the ½ cup of reserved liquid, some salt, and cook for 30 minutes and taste again for salt. If you don't cook with greens a lot, you'll be surprised at how much they cook down.

If you made the pepper-vinegar sauce from the recipe we gave out last summer, this is the perfect dish to use them on.

From "Vegetarian cooking for everyone" by Deborah Madison

Creamy nut sauce with arugula

This tasty sauce is enhanced by the addition of arugula greens. It could serve many purposes: try it over pasta or rice, as an enhancement to cooked or steamed vegetables, or a dressing for mashed potatoes. You can also thin it out with broth of milk and serve it as a soup, although with all this dairy, it makes for a very rich soup.

1 cup unsalted nuts; cashews, walnuts, almonds or filberts should work well
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil or 4 T butter
¼ tsp freshly grated nutmeg (optional)
Salt and pepper
1 cup cream (plus more for thinning, if desired)
Milk or vegetable stock for thinning (if desired)
½ to 1 cup of chopped arugula greens.

Wash the arugula well and then spin it dry and chop. Set this aside. Grind the nuts in a food processor or mortar and pestle until they are the consistency of coarse meal. Then heat the fat in a deep skillet over medium heat. When it is hot, add the ground nuts, and cook for a minute, stirring constantly, until the mixture smells good. Then turn the heat down and continue cooking until the mixture darkens and forms a paste. Next add the chopped arugula and cook for a minute or two, until the greens are well wilted. Sprinkle with nutmeg, salt and pepper if you wish. Then add the cream and gently cook for 5-7 minutes without boiling until the mix thickens (stirring all the while). Taste and adjust the seasoning. You can serve the sauce as is, or blend it with an immersion or counter-top blender.

From 'How to cook everything vegetarian' by Mark Bittman

Red lentil dal with celeriac

This simple Indian Dal is spruced up with some celery root. You could try adding some chopped arugula to this near the end of cooking.

1 medium celery root, peeled and chopped
1 cup dried red lentils
2 T minced fresh ginger
1 T minced garlic
4 cardamom pods
1 T yellow mustard seeds
2 cloves
1 t cracked black pepper
1 dried chile pepper, such as an ancho, chopped (optional)
Salt
2 T cold butter or peanut oil (optional)
Chopped fresh cilantro leaves for garnish (optional)

Combine the lentils, ginger, garlic, cardamom, mustard seeds, cloves, pepper, and chile pepper and the chopped celery root. Add water to cover by about 1 inch. Bring to a boil then lower the heat to a simmer for 20-30 minutes until the lentils are very soft. Remove the cloves and cardamom, and stir in the optional butter or oil, garnish if you wish, and serve over rice or another grain such as millet or bulgur.

From 'How to cook everything vegetarian' by Mark Bittman