

Big Leaf Farm

Winter Season 2009-10

Week 6-7 Jan. 17- 30, 2010

Farm News

By the calendar, spring is still several months away, but here at the farm we can already feel its imminent arrival. We've noticed some green buds on perennial shrubs and the daffodils are starting to put up green shoots. Perhaps due to the warm weather and lengthening days, we're starting to see growth in many of our crops. Over wintering greens that survived the cold weather, such as kale, collards, and chicories are showing a lot of new growth, and we are hoping that you'll be able to benefit from some of this growth in your share this week.

December and early January are the months I plan the coming season's garden. To make sure that we can grow enough to keep the CSA supplied every week of the season I plan out how much of each crop we need to grow for each week's distribution. Then I decide when to sow this crop, how much room it will take up,



and where in the field it will be situated. This allows me to come up with a sowing schedule for next year and a field map which shows where everything will be planted. I use spreadsheets to keep everything straight in order to maintain some order of sanity during the busy days of spring and early summer when everything needs to be done at once.

So far I've ordered all the seeds, and now am coming up with a sowing schedule. We've already sowed the first seeds of the year – mostly long season

members of the allium family such as storage onions and leeks. Some of the plants that come from these seeds will be given out in shares in 12-15 months from now!

In the year to come we will be doubling the number of our membership, but this doesn't necessarily mean we grow more crops, just that we grow a larger amount of each individual crop. In fact, in 2010 we plan to grow about 115 varieties of vegetables, down from about 120 last year. I was surprised when I added up the number of seeds I recently ordered – in the year to come we will sow over 130,000 seeds! The first of the boxes of seeds have started showing up in the mail and the anticipation of the year to come is ripe in the air as I begin to visualize next year's crops.

This week marks the last distribution for our winter share season. We'd like to thank everyone that stayed with us throughout 2009, as well as those new members who signed up for the winter share. We look forward to seeing many of you throughout 2010! Thanks again for your flexibility and understand this winter.

Cast of characters

- **Carrots:** These are the very last of our carrots. They've been in storage since mid-November so they look a little rough around the edges, but they should taste fine once they are peeled and trimmed. We won't have carrots at the farm until next June or early July.
- **Winter squash:** This winter squash is called "Golden Nugget". It was bred as a substitute for sweet potatoes in Northern region where sweet potatoes can't be grown. It's not as sweet as a sweet potato, but it's still really tasty. It can be cooked as an acorn squash (cut in half and baked). This squash has a hard skin, so peeling it while raw is tricky – it's best cooked first, then you can use the soft flesh in recipes. It makes a great pumpkin pie. Check out the squash recipe below.
- **Onions:**
- **Potatoes:** These are the last of our Burbank Russet potatoes. They should keep fine for several weeks in a cool dark place.
- **Parsnips:**
- **Leeks:**
- **Kale:** We managed to find enough kale so that everyone gets a little bit. If you've never tried kale raw, try chopping some of this very fine and adding it to a lettuce salad or cabbage slaw. It has very good flavor – a little chewy but very tasty. For a real treat try the kale chips recipe, given below.
- **Chicory:** Superficially this looks a little 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 round tight head like a cabbage. Leaf chicories are bitter just like radicchio, and while they can be

eaten raw in a salad, most folks probably like them better cooked. If you are familiar with escarole then you'll have ideas for cooking this one – although that is a different species, the two are similar in their flavor and use.

If you are unfamiliar with this vegetable you should at least taste it raw. Compare the taste of the blanched inner leaves



with the outer greener red-flecked leaves. There is a wonderful recipe with this cooked green given below. Feel free to use it as you would cabbage in a stir fry – just chop it finely and cook it until soft.

Recipes

Kale chips

This is one of my favorite ways to cook kale – you won't believe how yummy this is until you taste it! We wish we had more kale to give out because it's easy to burn through a lot of kale when making this dish.

Kale
Olive oil
Salt

Wash the kale and pat dry with a towel or spin in a salad spinner. Remove the thickest part of the stems and roughly shred to chip-size, then toss it in a bowl with a tablespoon or two of olive oil. Alternatively, once you dry the kale you can spray it with some oil while tossing it. Using either method, you want the kale to be well coated with a very thin coating of oil. Sprinkle it with salt once it is covered in oil and place on a cookie sheet in an oven that has been preheated to 375°. Don't crowd the kale – it will cook best if it is only one layer thick with some room to breathe. Cook it until the edges are brown, but not burnt, turning with a spatula once or twice, until the chips are dry and crispy.

Winter squash tostada

Here's a non-beany twist on a classic Mexican dish.

2 cups cooked squash pulp
4 tortillas (corn or small flour)
1 T oil
1 t chili powder
1 garlic clove, minced

1 t oregano

1 c shredded cheddar or jack cheese

4 c shredded lettuce or cabbage

salsa

2-4 T toasted, shelled pumpkin seeds. Toast them beforehand on a dry hot skillet.

Slice the squash in half and place it cut side down on a cookie sheet and bake until the inside is soft, about 30-45 min. Toast the tortillas in a skillet or over an open flame, briefly. Then heat the oil in a heavy skillet and sprinkle with the chili powder, cumin, and minced garlic. Fry the spices until they are fragrant, then add the squash pulp and the oregano, frying, until the squash is heated through. Then place the filling on the tortilla and sprinkle with cheese and place under a broiler until the cheese is melted. Finally, top with the shredded lettuce or cabbage, add some salsa, and finally with a sprinkle of toasted pumpkin seeds.

From "The New Laurel's Kitchen" by Laurel Robertson, et al.

Chicory risotto

We gave this recipe out at the end of our regular season, but there are enough new folks that we thought it was worth repeating. 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. We've heard this is also nice with orzo – you would have to adjust the cooking time accordingly. These heads of chicory are a little on the small side, but we think they are worth giving out to give everyone a try. If you want to bulk up this recipe a little bit, try adding some chopped mushrooms – just add them when the onions are done cooking.

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.