



BLUE HOUSE FARM

CSA Newsletter

In The Weeds

June 17, 2011

Weeds have recently dominated most of my time on the farm. Those heavy rains we got a couple of weeks ago germinated a ton of weeds in the field. Normally, May and June are dry months and the fields are fairly weed-free. After irrigating an area, the weeds sprout and when they are real tiny I cultivate with the tractor or send the crew through with hoes. It is manageable in small areas when you can control the timing and because of the small, tender size of the weeds, the work is light and fast. This year however, those rains were the equivalent of irrigating the whole farm at once, which means all of the weeds sprouted at the same time and the whole farm basically needs to be weeded NOW, which is of course impossible. So the weeds in some fields get bigger, the hoeing gets slower, and it gets pretty darn hard to even see the tiny carrots among the weeds when looking down from the tractor seat.

This winter I purchased a tractor specifically designed to better control the weeds through precision cultivating. In the days before herbicides were used, most weed control on farms both big and small were done through mechanical means. Typically this meant driving a lightweight tractor with narrow wheels that fit nicely in the furrows without creating too much disturbance to the rows of crops. Under the tractor or behind the tractor ran a combination of knives, chisels, or discs. The knives cut just below the surface of soil and cut the roots, the chisels disturb and mix the soil a bit, and the discs throw soil and bury the weeds.

My tractor was designed for and used on tobacco farms in Kentucky during the 70's. After herbicides became the dominant method of weed control in the 80's, they stopped making these tractors and they have since become hard to find, especially here on the West Coast. I had to drive a trailer to Phoenix, AZ to get mine...and it was worth every mile. These tractors are well built and perfectly designed for a diversified farming operation. The tractor engine and seat is slightly offset so when you are driving, you can look straight down and watch the crops fly by. I can cut the weeds about an inch on either side of the crops, which is impressive to witness, and leaves only a tiny two inch swath of weeds for the crew to hoe.

Right now I could use a team of tractors, but instead I have just one. And because the tractor is a bit like driving an antique, I prefer to be

Anticipated Harvest

Red Beets
Red Russian Kale
Spring Onions
Red Batavian Lettuce
Green Garlic
Spring Salad Mix
Strawberries

Though human beings have enjoyed beets for thousands of years, for many hundreds of years they were grown primarily for their greens and not at all for their roots (in fact, chard is the exact same species as table beets). It wasn't until the fall of the Roman Empire that the beetroot blew up. Today, Red Ace Beets, the variety in your box today, are the most popular beet in America.

Beetroots are full of Calcium, Potassium, Folic Acid & vision-aiding Phytonutrients, while beet greens are even healthier, delivering Beta-Carotene, Vitamins A & C, Iron and a higher dose of Calcium.

Beets don't need to be peeled, though many folks prefer to. Raw beets are great for juicing or grating into a salad. Beets can be steamed, boiled, sautéed, and of course, roasted! And don't forget those greens! Sautéed with some garlic, red pepper & a dash of vinegar, they're the perfect accompaniment for beetroots.

the only one driving it. It has loads of levers to learn, no power steering, is really loud, and requires constant attention. If you look up for more than a few seconds and veer even an inch off course, you are likely to cut the crops along with the weeds. But regardless of its quirks, it is so satisfying to look behind and see all those weeds gone and the healthy lines of crops still standing. So when I'm not writing newsletters, selling at markets, or doing deliveries...I've been riding that tractor, cultivating.

Enjoy your berries (and salads),
Ryan

New change in order deadline is 9:00 PM the Saturday before delivery:

I apologize again for any confusion around the add-on orders. We've been struggling to familiarize ourselves with the new online system and yesterday we discovered a major goof. We just learned the deadline was actually set

for the Wednesday the week *before*, not of, delivery, which explained why people had been placing orders and they were not appearing on our delivery list. So we've changed it one last time to Saturday at 9:00AM, the week of delivery. This will allow us ample time to coordinate orders, but it means that you will not be able to make last-minute additions or changes.



Braised Onion Polenta

2 -3 Spring Onions
4 T Butter
1 Cup Polenta Corn Meal
4 Cups Water
Salt & Pepper
Several Sprigs Rosemary, Leaves Minced
Crushed Red Pepper (optional)
Parmigiano-Reggiano (to taste)

Halve and slice the onions. Melt 3 T butter in a skillet, then add onions and rosemary (and red pepper if using) and stir to coat, sprinkle with a healthy pinch of salt and then reduce heat to the lowest possible setting and cover. Cook the onions over very low heat, stirring occasionally, for 30-45 minutes.

While the onions braise, put the water in a pot and bring it to a boil. Add salt, then stir or whisk in the corn meal gradually. Keep the pot over medium-high to high heat, so that the polenta bubbles vigorously, and stir frequently. The corn meal becomes polenta when it scrapes away from the side of the pot, about 20-30 minutes.

Once you've put the corn meal into the water, remove the cover from the onions. The slow cooking should have leached a considerable amount of liquid from the onions; turn the heat to medium-high and cook away the liquid, and continue until the onions are nicely browned...caramelization is key!

When the polenta is ready, remove from heat and add the onions, remaining butter, and a handful of parmesan. Let rest for 5-10 minutes, then serve with more cheese and freshly ground black pepper.

Marinated Kale

1 Bunch Kale
1 Spring Onion
4 Sun Dried Tomatoes
1/2 Cup Walnuts (optional)
1.5 T Olive Oil
Juice of 1/2 Lemon
Salt
Pepper

Destem the kale, then slice the leaves into 1/2" ribbons. Toss all the ingredients together in a non-reactive bowl.

Let sit for 30 minutes to 2 hours to let the marinade soften the kale. Toss once more before serving.

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Patzaria Salata Hellenic Beets

4 - 5 Beets
1 - 2 Spring Onions
2 - 3 Shoots Green Garlic
Juice of 1 Lemon
1/2 - 1 Cup Olive Oil
Salt
Pepper

Bring a pot of water to a boil, then add the beets and cook until tender (test with a fork after 15 minutes, can take anywhere from 15-30 minutes). Drain beets, and when cool peel (optional) and dice into 1/4" cubes.

Chop the onion and combine in a non-reactive bowl with beets.

Slice and mash up the garlic with salt, then slowly add the oil and whisk them together to form an emulsion. When combined, whisk in lemon juice.

Toss beets and onions with lemon-garlic dressing. Season with additional salt and pepper.