



BLUE HOUSE FARM

CSA Newsletter

Comings & Goings

July 22, 2011

It's beginning to feel a lot like summer; the morning fog is burning off earlier and earlier, sunscreen and big floppy hats are replacing sweatshirts and muckboots, and of course, a weekend spent feasting on strawberries, shortcake and sunshine will make anyone feel like they're on vacation.

A mighty thanks to everyone who managed to make it out to our annual Summer Strawberry Festival last weekend; it was great to put faces on so many familiar names, and to see so many smiling people wandering about this little slice of heaven we call home. In fact, our fearless leader Ryan may have partied himself out (and/or has a ton of tractor work to do), as he deputized me (that would be JJ, your fearless emailer of newsletters) to write this week's Field Note.

If you didn't get the chance to make it out here, fret ye not; we have one more big shindig planned later this year, the Autumn Harvest Festival, that promises to be an even wilder party. More details as we figure them out! And for all those who asked, you'll find my Strawberry Shortcake recipe on the flipside of this newsletter.

Summer is making itself known on the farm in more ways that just extended periods of sunshine. Our wide array of summer crops are threatening to bust out any day now; the tomatoes are getting trellised up and are tentatively putting forth their first green fruits: the cucumbers are beginning to assume their trademark sprawl across wide swaths of the field: and the flower field is exploding into a kaleidoscopic array of color. You'll get your first taste of the summer crops this week with those overachievers of summer vegetables: summer squash.

While summer ushers in many bounties on the farm, it also signals a slowdown for other crops. The sweet peas, the dependable bulwark of our flowers all spring, are beginning to get shorter and worn out. The recently feted strawberries are starting to slow as well, though we hope to encourage another burst of productivity with pruning. But one of the marvelous things about engaging in seasonal agriculture is learning to revel in each season's particular pleasures, made all the more sweet by the time you spend waiting for their return in the interim.

Speaking of return, Ryan will be back in this space next week. Til then, Excelsior\

-JJ

Anticipated Harvest

Summer Squash
Broccoli
Chioggia Beets
Red Onions
Red Russian Kale
Lettuce, Assorted Varieties
Italian Parsley
Strawberries

Believe it or not, Summer Squash and Winter Squash are the same species of plant: Cucurbita Pepo. The main difference between the two is shelf-life; Summer Squash is picked when immature and thus have a short storage life and availability, while Winter Squash are harvested when the plants' rinds become tough and, if stored properly, last all winter long (hence the name Winter Squash). Summer Squash would develop a tough rind too if we let it grow ...but it wouldn't taste that good! We grow numerous varieties of Summer Squash, some of which may be new to you like Yellow Zucchini, Lebanese Zucchini (also called Magda Squash), the half-yellow half-green Zephyr Squash and numerous colors of Pattypan Squash. Fortunately, all varieties of Summer Squash are interchangeable in recipes and, though their flavors differ, all can be prepared in the same fashion. Simple preparations are often best: try stir-frying or roasting. Summer Squash are high in Vitamins A & C, Manganese and several antioxidants unique to Summer Squash.

Zucchini Fritte Con La Pastella

Batter-Fried Summer Squash

1 lb Summer Squash 2/3 C Flour
Vegetable Oil Salt

Slice summer squash lengthwise into 1/8 inch thick slices. Put 1 cup of water in a soup plate and add the flour, constantly beating with a fork until the batter has the consistency of sour cream.

Pour enough oil into a skillet to come 3/4 inch up its sides and turn the heat to high. When the oil is quite hot, drop the squash slices a few at a time into the batter, then transfer to the skillet; the oil should be hot enough to sizzle on contact with the battered squash. Do not overcrowd the pan. Cook until a fine golden crust forms on one side, then flip. Transfer to paper toweling lined plate, repeat with remaining squash.

Sprinkle with salt and serve piping hot. -*Adaptation of a Marcella Hazan recipe*



JJ's Strawberry Festival Shortcake

By popular request, here's the recipe for the shortcake I made during last weekend's Strawberry Festival. The recipe is somewhat involved, but still quite easy to make. The below will make enough shortcake to serve as dessert for a large family.



The Shortcake

1 3/4 C All-Purpose Flour
1/4 C & 1 T Sugar
1 Stick (4 oz.) Unsalted Butter, Cold
1/2 C Heavy Cream
2 Eggs
2 tsp Baking Powder
1/4 tsp Salt
1 T Water

The Whipped Cream

2 C Heavy Cream
2 T Sugar
1/4 tsp Vanilla Extract

The Strawberry Topping

At least 2 Pints Strawberries
1 T Sugar
Juice of Half A Lemon

Begin with the shortcake: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, 1/4 C sugar, baking powder & salt. While the butter is still cold, chop it into pea-sized cubes (about 1 or 2 cm²), then add it to the dry ingredients. Using your hands, massage the butter into dry ingredients, rubbing the ingredients between your fingers until the entire mixture takes on the appearance of breadcrumbs. Once you achieve that texture, put the bowl into the freezer to prevent the butter from melting.

In a separate smaller bowl whisk together the cream and one egg. Once the flour-butter mixture has chilled in the freezer a bit (about 5 to 10 minutes), remove it and make a well in the center of the ingredients; pour the egg-cream into the well. The dough will be very wet and sticky and first, so begin mixing with a wooden spoon or spatula before using your hands to bring all the ingredients together. Be careful not to overwork the dough! Stop as soon as the ingredients have combined to form a smooth, elastic dough.

Turn the dough out onto parchment paper or a floured work surface. Fold the dough over on itself once, then do so again. Using a floured rolling pin (or your bare hands in a pinch), roll out the dough so that it will cover most of a 9x13 sheet pan. Place the dough on the aforementioned sheet pan. Create an egg wash by mixing the remaining egg and 1 T water and brush the surface of the dough with it using a pastry brush or your bare fingers, then sprinkle with 1 T sugar. Place the sheet pan on the center rack of your oven. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until golden-brown on top.

As soon as the cake is in the oven, start on the topping. Slice the strawberries and then combine in a bowl with 1 T sugar and the lemon juice; the latter two ingredients will draw some of the juice from the berries, creating a kind of light syrup. Let this sit until you are ready to top the cake.

If you have an electric mixer, combine the remaining heavy cream, sugar and vanilla extract in a bowl and beat on high speed until it looks (and tastes) like whipped cream. If you don't have an electric mixer, place the ingredients in a large mason jar with a screw lid, close it tightly, then shake it vigorously until it reaches the desired consistency.

When the cake is golden-brown on top, remove it from the oven and place it on a wire rack to cool. When it has cooled enough for you to handle it safely, cut it into squares. Top each square with a dollop of whipped cream and several spoonfuls of the strawberry topping.