BLUE HOUSE FARM
CSA Newsletter

Crepuscule with Veggies

08.26.2011

The sun FINALLY came out for three days straight this week (I'm hoping I don't jinx it by writing about it). Last week we found some time to plant an acre of cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and leeks. This week I'll be planting some more late-season beets, spinach, salad mix, and radishes. After such a late, wet spring and slow, foggy summer, I'm really crossing my fingers for a nice long and warm autumn.

One benefit of not having tomatoes to deal with right now is that we are able to focus more time and energy on the crops closer to home. Normally those tomatoes suck up a day or two out of each week for trellising, picking, and packing. This year we have been spending that time hoeing existing beds (the farm looks pretty darn clean), planting more quick-growing Fall crops, and, of course, harvesting. And the harvest has been no small feat lately; our delivery trucks have been leaving the farm very full, four days a week. It takes a heck of a lot of cutting, bunching, digging, washing, and packing to fill those trucks each day. I am amazed on a daily basis at the volume and quality of produce that our small, dedicated crew can create, over and over again.

As the fall approaches, I welcome the shorter days. I admittedly tend to be a bit of a workaholic, and if the sun is shining and work needs to be done, I'll likely be out doing it. Some of my most productive time is after the crew has gone home and I am left undistracted to fix things, start new projects, and hop on the tractor and simply space-out for a bit while mowing or cultivating. The early dusk is also precious to me as a time for reflection. I often find myself wandering the fields, watching sprinklers, and marveling at the beautiful tapestry of colors and textures of a fully grown field of diverse crops. The gloaming is also the time when I reflect on all of the work that has gone into creating that field and all of the people out there who will be enjoying its bounty at the kitchen table.

We have some new crops maturing in the field and the fall season will be well represented in your boxes in the coming weeks. We'll start putting peppers in your boxes next week. The first planting of cucumbers is producing very poorly, but I think we should have enough to put one or two in each box next week. Another round of beets should be ready in a week or two. We'll take a brief break from the beans for a couple weeks, but then the second planting should start producing. We also have a nice stand of soybeans that should be ready about the same time.

Anticipated Harvest

Artichokes
Cheddar Cauliflower
Fava Beans
Rainbow Chard
Summer Squash
Stockton Yellow Onions
Red Batavian Lettuce
Salad Mix
Thyme
Gravenstein Apples

We clever humans have taken culinary advantage of just about every part of plants: their roots, their stems, their leaves, their fruit and their flowers. Still, it was a brave forefather that first looked upon the thistle we call Artichoke and thought "Hey, I'd like to eat that!" Exactly where that happened is lost to history; their wild ancestors grew in the North African Maghreb, but the first records of their cultivation occur in Sicily about 2,500 years ago. Today, Italians are still the only ones distilling liquor from Artichokes!

We tend to harvest our Artichokes on the young side, before they have formed the inedible, immature florets called the "choke," so you can eat the whole bud, stem and all. I'd recommend plucking off some of the outer leaves (botanically speaking, these are technically bracts) if they appear tough or loose, and peel the stem (the stem is delicious!) and halving or quartering the bud (if they're on the large side, you can check for a choke this way too). Be sure to have acidulated water (lemon juice+H_2O) on hand, as otherwise Artichokes will turn brown after cutting.

Artichokes are a good source of vegetable Protein, Vitamin C, Fiber & Potassium, as well as possessing one of the highest antioxidant capacities of all vegetables.

We'll continue to put apples and hopefully other tree fruit from the orchard in your boxes regularly. Strawberries will be somewhat irregularly included (they are slowing down tremendously,) and as the melons ripen (should be another two weeks) they will be include too. And when the melons are ripe, we should have a lot of them. For a first-time crop, I may have gotten a little carried away by planting so many! But they are an easy crop to grow, we had the room, and who is going to complain about having too many melons?

From the field,
Ryan

Citrus & Artichoke BBQ

1 lb Artichokes
2 Cloves Garlic
3 Meyer Lemons
2 Tangerines
½ C Olive Oil
Salt & Pepper
Extra Lemons or Lemon Juice for Acidulated Water

In a large bowl, mix together some lemon juice and water to create the acidulated water bath. Trim and halve (or quarter) artichokes, and put them in the acidulated water until ready to use. Mince the garlic. Zest 2 of the Meyer Lemons & all Tangerines, and separate their fruit into segments. Juice the remaining lemon.

Steam or parboil the artichokes until just before tender. While the artichokes are steaming, combine the Meyer Lemon Juice, Olive Oil, Citrus Segments, Salt & Pepper. As soon as the artichokes are ready (about 10 minutes if steaming), remove them from the water/steam and add them in the Citrus Marinade. Toss to coat evenly. Cover and refrigerate, This may be done hours ahead of time.

When ready to grill, fire up the BBQ and place the artichokes and citrus segments on the grill. Cook until just charred, about 2-4 minutes.

Ful - Moroccan Fava Beans

1 lb Fava Beans
3 Cloves Garlic
3 T Fresh Parsley
2 tsp Paprika
1 tsp Whole Cumin
4 T Olive Oil
1 C Water
Juice & Zest of 1 Lemon
Salt & Pepper

String & shell the favas, chop the garlic and toast and grind the cumin.

In a small pot, combine the favas, garlic, spices, olive oil and water. Bring to a simmer and cook, covered, for 20 minutes.

Add the salt and lemon juice, replace cover and simmer for another 5 to 10 minutes until the liquid has reduced to a sauce. Remove from heat and add parsley. Taste and adjust for seasoning..

Ginger Apple Crisp

For the Baked Apples:
5 C Gravenstein Apples
1 T Sugar
1 T Flour

For the Ginger-Crisp Topping:
¾ C Flour
3 T Brown Sugar
1 T Granulated Sugar
2 tsp Candied Ginger
¼ tsp Salt
¼ tsp Cinnamon
4 T Butter, cut into pea-sized pieces.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Begin with the Ginger-Crisp Topping. Combine the flour, sugars, ginger, salt and cinnamon in a bowl. Add the butter and massage it into the flour mixture with your fingers until just combined; it should have a chunky, crumbly texture. Chill until ready to use.

Peel, core, and slice the apples. In a mixing bowl, toss the apples with the sugar and flour. Pile the fruit into an 8x8 baking dish and top with the crisp topping. Bake for 40 minutes, rotating once or twice, until the crisp is golden-brown and the fruit is bubbling.