



BLUE HOUSE FARM

CSA Newsletter

The September Burn

09.29.2011

This is the time of the year when I start to feel a little overwhelmed. We are still at the height of harvest with a lot of crops in the ground that need to be picked and sold before the year is over. And our year will stay busy with harvest into mid-December, which still feels pretty far off. It is also the time to start cleaning up the parts of the fields where the crops are finished and need to be mowed and turned under in preparation for cover crops. On top of all of this, it is time to start preparing for next year. Strawberries, garlic, leeks, onions, carrots, beets, and broccoli all need to get planted in the next month for next Springs harvest. The strawberries are among the biggest projects. Each year we rotate the location of the berries on a five-year cycle. This deters pests and disease from building up and improves the productivity of the crop.

I spend more time, money, materials, and labor on strawberries than any other crop... and for good reason. They taste really good and we seemingly can never have enough of them for the CSA, farmers markets, and stores. This next year I am planning to plant over twice as many as this year, which will be about two acres. I begin preparing the field by mowing the previous crop and then tilling in the plant residue. Then I apply almost 100 yards of compost, which is A LOT, about two semi-truckloads! Then I irrigate, unless we get some rainfall. By that time, the plant residue is usually broken down and I rip the field. Ripping is the practice of running a huge shank about 1.5 feet below the soil, breaking p any compaction that was created from the year before and allowing good drainage for the strawberries. Then I till the field again. After tilling, I shovel the beds and create long, straight furrows and hills. Then I shape the bed with a bed-shaper that hugs the bed behind the tractor and creates very smooth flat bed tops and sides. Now comes the labor. The crew runs two lines of drip-tape down the center of the beds and stakes them tightly at each end. The bed is then covered with black plastic mulch pulled very tightly over the bed. Now we wait about a month. The black plastic solarizes the soil and kills any emerging weeds. In early December, we cut holes in the plastic and plant. Whew!

In other news, the weather this year continues to surprise me. This last week Pescadero had perfect weather. Folks on the farm were actually using the word "hot" to describe the temperature. And next week we are expecting more warm weather with potential thundershowers, followed by a shift to cooler weather with the first Fall rains. The weather has the crops a little confuse, but it is exciting nonetheless. -Ryan

Anticipated Harvest

Early Girl Tomatoes
Rainbow Chard
Broccoli
Green Beans
Candy Onions
Red Batavian Lettuce
Basil

Golden Delicious Apples

Chances are, you're familiar with the phenomenon of Dry-Farmed Early Girl tomatoes. Their popularity is so established here in the Bay Area that even the most cursory research into the subject finds mention of the "Early Girl Cult." Of course, the ubiquitous Dry-Farmed Early Girl has only been established here for two decades, and many outside the Bay Area would still find the phrase "Dry-Farmed" peculiar, so a brief survey is not uncalled for. Dry-Farming is a technique that has been honed for centuries, if not millennia, by the inhabitants of the world's most arid places. In the case of the tomato, the plant is given abundant water as a greenhouse sprout until it's transplanted out into the field. At that point, the farmer ceases actively watering the plants: the lack of water encourages the tomato to send its roots deep into the earth in search of moisture. The stress of this activity causes the sugars and other flavor-producing compounds to become concentrated in the fruit, resulting in a remarkably tasty tomato. For all its wonders, however, the Early Girl is still susceptible to Blight, a fungus that can wipe out acres of tomatoes in the span of a week...as sadly happened to our crop!



Don't Forget!

The Blue House Farm 2011 Harvest Festival is Sunday, October 9th from 1-5PM!

Bring the family and enjoy an afternoon of fun and food on the farm.

Stewed Green Beans & Parmesan Chips

½ lb Green Beans
¼ lb Tomatoes, Rough Chopped
1 Small Onion, Sliced
2 Cloves Garlic, Minced
¼ C Dry White Wine
4-5 Fresh Basil Leaves
½ C Parmigiano-Reggiano
1 T Butter
Salt & Pepper

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, then parboil the green beans about 3 minutes: they should be just tender but still possess some snap. Immediately drain the beans and plunge them into cold water.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, and spoon out a heaping tablespoon of parmesan about an inch or so apart. Bake 3-5 minutes, until golden and crisp.

Melt the butter in a large skillet, and as soon as it's melted add the sliced onions and a pinch of salt. Stir to coat the onions and cook until shiny, then add the garlic and cook for another couple of minutes until garlic is a pale gold. Add the tomatoes and continue sautéing for 5 minutes, until tomatoes start to melt. Add the green beans, and continue cooking until the tomato juice evaporates, about 10 minutes, then add the wine and basil. Simmer another couple of minutes, then plate and serve, topped with parmesan chips.

Sweet & Sour Chard

1 Bunch Rainbow Chard
1 Onion
1 Small Orange
2 T Sugar
2 T Balsamic Vinegar
Salt & Pepper
Olive Oil

Separate the stems from the chard leaves. Chop both but keep them separate. Thinly slice the onion. Chop the orange, removing any seeds but leaving the peel on.

Put some oil and the onion in a skillet over medium heat. When the onion starts to sizzle, add the sugar and stir, then add the chopped orange and reduce the heat to low. Cook, stirring frequently, for about 10 minutes or everything is caramelized. Stir in the vinegar.

Return heat to medium and add the chard stems. Cook for a couple of minutes, stir, then add the chard leaves, cover the skillet and remove from heat. Let sit for a couple minutes, then stir again and re-cover. After two more minutes, adjust seasoning and serve.

Parmesan Roasted Broccoli

2 Large Heads Broccoli
4-5 Cloves Garlic
3 T Pine Nuts
Zest & Juice of 1 Lemon
8-10 Basil Leaves
1/3 C Parmigiano-Reggiano
Salt & Pepper
Olive Oil

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Break down the heads of broccoli into florets, peeling and chopping the stalk. Place florets on a baking sheet (or two) in a single layer. Thinly slice the garlic, then toss it over the broccoli and drizzle everything with a generous amount of olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, then roast for about 20-25 minutes. The broccoli should be crisp-tender but browned.

Remove broccoli from oven and immediately toss with the lemon juice & zest, pine nuts, parmesan cheese, basil and another tablespoon of olive oil. Serve at once.