



BLUE HOUSE FARM

CSA Newsletter

To Creek Or Not To Creek

10.06.2011

It has been nice to watch the creek rise after these first fall rains. Each of the three main farm fields is located adjacent to three different creeks around Pescadero. The size of the creek and volume of water available greatly influences the crops that can be grown and the method of irrigation to do so. Around the home site - which some of you have visited and hopefully more will this weekend for our Harvest Festival - our pump draws water from a very small creek, the smallest of our three sites. In a wet year such as this one, when we get ample winter rains and the springs that feed the creek are plentiful, I've found that we can grow about 8 acres of crops with overhead watering, 2 acres with drip irrigation, and 2 acres of dry-farmed vegetables. In a drier year, or worse after consecutive dry years, more acreage would need to be dry-farmed and drip-irrigated and less acreage could be overhead watered. So why not grow more crops on drip or dry-farm more? 1. Only a small number of crops can be dry-farmed (not watered.) Specifically, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins, and winter squash. 2. Installing drip-irrigation is expensive. The materials cost money and the labor to install it and maintain it throughout the season does too. 3. Although drip irrigation uses less water, it does require a whole lot of plastic, some of which is not recyclable. 4. Most crops just perform better when irrigated overhead, it mimics natural rainfall and plants like rain.

Water is a highly desired and necessary resource for farmers in general but specifically on the San Mateo coast. Most farms around here pull their water from the creeks. A careful look at the San Mateo coastline on Google Earth shows the proximity of farmland to the creeks. Other agricultural areas, such as nearby Watsonville, have countywide irrigation infrastructure. These are basically giant underground pipes that distribute water from a main water source, such as a large reservoir, to the surrounding farmland. Some of this water comes very long distances to feed the reservoirs and eventually reach the farms. The farms that are part of this irrigation system have the benefit of convenience, but also are victims of increasing water prices and potentially risk being limited in use due to local and state political decisions.

Most farmers on the San Mateo coast are very proud of our independence from non-local water sources. Of course we do get frustrated: pipes break, pumps lose their prime, and the price of fuel and electricity to run the pumps fluctuate. And we do stress-out in August and September when the creeks are getting lower than we would like, especially in the dry years. But for myself, I

Anticipated Harvest

Early Girl Tomatoes
Bunched Spinach
Green Curly Kale
Romaine Lettuce
Jalapeño Peppers
Artichokes
Red Beets
Nicola Potatoes
Marjoram
Golden Delicious Apples

Remember when "eat your spinach" was said as though a threat? If only all punishment was as yummy! Spinach presumably originated somewhere between modern-day Turkey and Iran: the Chinese, who were the first to record its cultivation, called spinach "The Persian Green" (and still call it that today). The West became acquainted with spinach thanks to the Arabs, who first discovered how to grow it in the Mediterranean and introduced it to Europe early in the second millennium C.E. Europeans enthusiastically adopted and promoted the potent leaf, especially the Italians, French & Sephardic Jews, helping spinach to become the ubiquitous green of today. What about preparation, you ask? Raw spinach is higher in fiber and nonheme iron, meaning you need to consume Vitamin C with the spinach in order to make its iron bioavailable, but it also can block the absorption of calcium or iodine if eaten in excess. Cooking spinach activates its amazing list of nutrients, like Manganese, Folate, Magnesium, Calcium, Vitamins A, C, K, and several B Vitamins, but also increases the amount of kidney-troubling oxalates. So the best bet? Balance between raw and cooked!



Meet Lucky, the new farm puppy!

prefer my independence and the associated challenge of pump and pipe mechanics over that of convenience. And I prefer the limits of water availability to be dictated by natural rainfall rather than politics.

Here’s to the beginning of hopefully another wet winter! -Ryan

HARVEST FESTIVAL THIS SUNDAY!
This Sunday, October 9th, from 1–5PM, don’t miss your last chance of the year to visit Blue House Farm! There’ll be Tractor Rides, Pumpkin Carving, Grilled Corn, Face-Painting, Strawberry Picking, Farmers Market, Farm Tours, & Farm Treats prepared by your humble newsletter writer! It’s FREE so tell your friends & bring the family!

<i>Borani Esfanaj – Persian Spinach Dip</i>	<i>Salsa Roja Tradicional</i>	<i>Colcannon – Irish Halloween Mash</i>
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- 1 Bunch Spinach
- 1 Small Onion
- 2 Cloves Garlic
- 1C Plain Yoghurt
- 1/8 tsp Cinnamon
- 1T Butter
- Salt & Pepper

Roughly chop the spinach. Bring two quarts of water to a rolling boil, add the spinach and boil for 1 minute then drain well. Place spinach between several paper towels and squeeze until the spinach is just barely moistened.

Chop the onions and mince the garlic. Melt the butter in skillet over medium heat, then add the onion and stir to coat. When the onion gets shiny, add the garlic and cook until it turns a pale gold. Remove from heat, then add the spinach and several pinches of salt and stir to combine. Let cool to room temperature.

Combine the cooled spinach mixture in a medium-sized bowl with the yoghurt, cinnamon, a couple grinds of black pepper and more salt if needed. Let stand for a half or so for flavors to marry, then refrigerate. Serve with pita or chips.

- 2 Medium Size Tomatoes
- 1 Small Onion
- 2 Cloves Garlic
- 1 or 2 Jalapeños
- 1T Olive Oil
- 1T Water
- Salt

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet over a medium flame. Halve the tomatoes, then add them to the pan. Slice the chiles, onion, and garlic, then add those to the pan. Roast these in the pan as long as you can without burning anything. Then pour the contents of the pan and the water into a blender and blend on the lowest setting (or better yet, mash the ingredients in a molcajete, the traditional mortar & pestle of Mexico). Taste and correct for salt, then pour the salsa into a bowl. You can serve immediately, but the salsa will intensify in flavor and spiciness the longer you let it rest in the refrigerator.

- 1 lb Potatoes
- 1 Bunch Curly Kale
- 1/3 C Milk
- 1/3 C Light Cream or Half n Half
- 2T Butter
- 2T Chopped Fresh Chives
- OR**
- ½ A Small Onion
- 1/3 lb Bacon (optional)
- Salt & Pepper

Place the potatoes in a large pot of water and bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for about half an hour, until potatoes are tender. If using the onion (instead of chives), chop it finely and then sauté it in the butter until translucent. Remove the potatoes from the water, then mash them with the butter (and onions if using).

If using bacon, cook it how you like it best (fried, in oven, in microwave) then set it aside. Destem the kale and chop or tear it into small pieces. Salt and the potato water (or another pot of boiling water), add the kale and boil for 10 minutes. Drain well.

Put the milk, cream, and scallions if using (instead of the onion) in a saucepan and bring to a gentle simmer over medium heat. Cook for a few minutes, then add it to the potatoes and beat well. Add the kale (and the bacon if using) and mix well to incorporate. Season with salt and generous amounts of fresh-ground black pepper.