



BLUE HOUSE FARM

CSA Newsletter

Why We Farm

10.14.2011

As happened after the Strawberry Festival, Ryan has asked me (JJ) to fill in for him this week (too much cider, perhaps?). Thanks to everyone who came out to the Harvest Festival last Sunday: it was a blast all-around.

Throughout the Harvest Fest, folks asked me (and/or Evelyn and Tristan) the same two questions: “What’s life like on the farm?” And “how did you get into farming in the first place?” So I thought I’d talk about that a bit.

Evelyn & I both live on the farm, while Tristan commutes from Santa Cruz. Evelyn & I live in yurts, which are circular, wood and canvas tent-like structures of Mongolian origin. Life is fairly basic when you’re confined to a circle 12’ in diameter, though we are fortunate to have both space-heaters and WiFi. We cook all our meals in the outdoor kitchen (where you were served Apple Crisp), with everything except pantry staples sourced from the farm.

We rise every morning before dawn to blearily sip coffee before attending the morning chores: feeding the chickens, fertilizing the strawberries, game-planning that day’s harvest & saying “buenos días” to our amazing Field Crew. Much of each day is spent on the harvest, and we all chip in: whether picking apples, digging potatoes, cutting spinach, bunching herbs or clipping flowers, we all spend a good deal of time getting dirty and sweaty. Everyone has his or her own areas of responsibility that require attention too, and the workday can stretch on past 5pm. No one works longer hours than Ryan; he’s often out riding that tractor till the sun goes down.

The days are long, and we’re often so worn by day’s end that we can hardly do more than fix dinner, play a round of Gin or Scrabble, then pass out at 8. So why should a group of young adults forgo the social life and comforts of the city for the sweat and exhaustion of the farm?

For me it’s simple; I can think of no more direct way to make the world a better place. When we build the soil through compost we are making that patch of earth a better place. When we practice cover-cropping that increases the soil’s ability to absorb carbon, we are making the sky a little bit cleaner. And when we build new models of food distribution (like the CSA), we are helping to balance out an economic system where producer and consumer rarely, if ever, meet. You, dear CSA member, are absolutely crucial to not just that last example, but everything we do. Without your support, many of the great things we do here would not be possible.

Excelsior\
-JJ

Anticipated Harvest

Parsnips

Early Girl Tomatoes

Green Beans or Eggplant

Rainbow Chard

Bunched Spinach

Green Curly Lettuce

Beets

Basil

Asian Pears or

Golden Delicious Apples

You’d probably be far more familiar with the noble Parsnip were it not for that rascal, the potato. Until the Conquest of the Americas brought the potato into Western consciousness (and even for a few hundred years after), the primary starch in a European diet was Parsnip, and for good reason! Though potatoes would be grown more cheaply, Parsnips provide far more nutritional bang, and a beguiling, spiced-sweet flavor unlike anything else. These attributes have long been recognized: the cultivation of Parsnips stretches back to antiquity, the Romans considered them a potent aphrodisiac and the Emperor Tiberius was so enamored with this sublime root that he had them shipped to Rome from Germany. Fortunately for this somewhat forgotten vegetable, if you know how to prepare carrots, you know how to prepare parsnips. Like their orange cousins, Parsnips are usual peeled (though I don’t find that necessary), and if the Parsnip has a woody core you should cut it out. Parsnips shine with minimal adornment, especially when roasted or steamed. Parsnips are an especially good source of Dietary Fiber, Potassium, Folate, Manganese, & Vitamin C.

Parsnips in Honey-Butter

This is essentially the same manner of preparing parsnips as was favored by the Roman Emperor Tiberius two thousand years ago, and it's still great.

1 lb Parsnips,
¼ C Butter
1 T Honey
Salt & Pepper

You can either peel the parsnips or leave the skin on; personally, I hardly peel anything nowadays but many folks still prefer the consistent texture of peeled veggies. Halve the parsnips (if their centers are woody, cut them out), and slice into ½ " thick strips. Place in steamer basket and set over boiling water for 10-15 minutes until just soft.

While the parsnips steam, melt the butter in a small pan over moderate heat. As soon as it is all melted, remove from heat and stir in the honey.

When ready, transfer parsnips to a warm serving plate and pour honey-butter over them. Finish with a generous sprinkle of salt and a healthy cracking of fresh black pepper.

Mothership Tomato Salad

Contributed by CSA Member Jenny P, who writes "Always a favorite, it's great for no-cook, hot summer nights. But it's hardy enough that even in the cold it's still good."

Want to share a recipe?

Email bluehousefarm@gmail.com or post it on our Facebook page:

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2¼lb Mixed Ripe Tomatoes
1 Clove Garlic
1 Fresh Chili
Dried Oregano
Red Wine or Balsamic Vinegar
Olive Oil
Salt & Pepper

Chop tomatoes in all kinds of shapes, no need to be uniform, and generously salt them. Place them in a colander for the juice to drain so the tomatoes become sweet and condensed (Jenny notes: "I noticed not much juice comes out with the Early Girls, so no worries if that happens"). Stir and let rest for 15 minutes.

While the tomatoes sit, mince or grate the garlic and deseed and chop the chili. Add the garlic and half the chili into a bowl. When the tomatoes are ready, toss them in the bowl and add your preferred amount of Dried Oregano, a good splash of vinegar, some olive oil and pepper. Taste and adjust for salt.

Jenny says: "Serve with fresh bread. We used the Whole Wheat Sour Dough from Companion Bakeshop and some Buffalo or Ovoline Mozzarella. You can take the other half of the chili, some olive oil, and cracked pepper and drizzle these over the mozzarella. If you have leftovers, you can eat the next day or you can mash up the leftover tomato with your hands or masher, chop up or add in some mozzarella and toss in some pasta for a cold pasta salad."

JJ's Harvest Festival Apple Crisp

By request, even though there are no apples in this week's CSA box. You could, however, very easily substitute Asian Pears for apples....food for thought!

For The Topping:

1C All-Purpose Flour
1C Golden-Brown Sugar
1C Old-Fashioned (Not Quick) Oats
¾C Butter, Cold
A Pinch of Salt

For The Filling:

3lbs Apples, Cored & Sliced
1 Lemon, Zested & Juiced
1T Orange Juice
3T All-Purpose Flour
1/3 C Granulated Sugar
1tsp Cinnamon
¼ tsp Fresh-Grated Nutmeg
A Pinch of Salt

Preheat oven to 375°.

The Filling: I didn't peel my apples at the Harvst Festival, but you can if you want to. If your apple-corer makes about ½" slices, there's no need for any additional chopping. If not (or if you're a knife-only kinda person), chop the apples into ½" to 1" chunks. Place them in an 8x8 casserole, add the lemon and orange juice and stir. Add the sugar, cinnamon, lemon zest, nutmeg, flour & salt and mix well.

The Topping: In a medium-sized bowl, combine the flour, sugar and oats and mix well. Chop the butter into pea-sized cubes (about ¼") and add to bowl. Massage the butter into the topping using your fingers, rubbing everything together till the mixture looks like apple crisp topping. Cover the fruit evenly with the topping.

Bake for 45-50 minutes, until topping is brown and fruit is bubbling. Serve with vanilla ice-cream and/or freshly whipped cream (Whip 1C Heavy Cream with whisk or electric beaters till peaks begin to form, then beat in 2 T Sugar + 1tsp Vanilla).