



BLUE HOUSE FARM

CSA Newsletter

In Review

11.11.11

I always enjoy this time of year, when the day length shortens, the evenings are crisp and cool, the mornings are frosty, and yet the late morning and afternoon hours remain warm. I love watching the dusty dirt roads that surround the fields slowly turn green as the grasses and clovers sprout from the first Fall rains. Now that we are fairly caught-up with fieldwork and the harvests are getting smaller, we have time to clean up some of our messes after a long and busy growing season. I, admittedly, also enjoy having two full days off a week again and starting work at 8:00, instead of 7:00.

This time of year also lends itself to reflection. I've been thinking a lot lately about this growing season, both the joys and challenges of the last 10 months, when the first seeds were sowed in the greenhouse. In February we had an unusually warm few weeks when I was able to plant some early crops for the first weeks of the CSA, but after that, from late-February through April the weather turned extremely wet, which was great for the creeks and allowed for ample water to irrigate the fields. But it also meant that it was hard to get early plantings in on time because the fields were too muddy for the tractors. This resulted in a late start to the year. Once the broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage started producing, we seemed to be off and running, but we did lose a few critical plantings of carrots, beets and radishes to weed and pest pressure. Spring onions did well, but our summer onions fell victim to rot and never got very big. We did have a whole bunch of small and medium sized ones, and I actually have come to really appreciate their smaller size in the kitchen.

The wet spring was followed by another unusual weather event when we got 2.5 inches of rain in early June. This caused a lot of rot in our strawberries, just when they were at their peak. This rain also initiated the first stage of Late Blight in our tomatoes. Then our summer started, but the weather never really warmed up. The lettuces this year did very well in the field, as did the kales, chard, spinach, broccoli, cabbage, beets, leeks, and generally any crop that appreciates cool weather. This was a great year for fresh beans, but a difficult year for shelling beans. Unfortunately, the cucumbers and summer squash did very mediocre; the plants grew, but were not very prolific with fruit. Aside from the June rot, the strawberries did pretty well: not extremely productive, but very tasty! Potatoes tasted great too and I thought we had a nice assortment of varieties throughout the year.

Anticipated Harvest

Baby Leeks

Broccoli or Red Radishes

Baby Carrots

Golden Beets

Tuscan Kale

Baby Green Cabbage

Romaine Lettuce

Thyme

Apples, Assorted Varieties

*Much like last week's subject of this space, **Leeks** have a pedigree that reaches back to Ancient Egypt. Not only was it depicted in wall drawings, but archaeologists have unearthed fossilized leeks at Egyptian sites too. Even the Bible testifies to the leek's presence in Ancient Egypt (Numbers 11:5)! Much like Forrest Gump, leeks have popped up regularly throughout recorded history. The Roman emperor Nero was nicknamed 'Porophagus,' Latin for 'leek-eater,' and leeks later became the national symbol of Wales when Welsh freedom fighters stuck leeks in their hats to distinguish them from the hated Saxons. Somehow leeks gained an aristocratic reputation in America, though in Europe they are widely viewed as peasant fare: indeed, the French word for leek, 'poireau,' also translates as 'simpleton!' Hopefully by now you know leeks are neither boorish nor snobby, but sport upper-class taste nonetheless! Like botanical cousins garlic and onions, you can maximize the nutritional benefit of leeks by letting them sit for at least 5 minutes after chopping or slicing them; this is because rupturing the leek's cell walls initiates the formation of the potent antioxidant allicin, which can take several minutes to complete. Leeks are also a good source of Vitamin C, Iron, Manganese, polyphenols & flavonoids.*



The Blue House defrosts in the morning sun.

We've had some nice warm Fall weather: gentle first rains and a fairly late first hard frost this week. Unlike some autumns, when the weather is either too wet or too dry, this year has been just right. I was happy to have 6 weeks of tomatoes, which is considerably shorter than most years but more than I expected after watching Blight decimate four acres. The apples have been productive, but cosmetically imperfect, while the pears needed more warm weather in order to be sweeter. Sweet peppers were a big disappointment for me, they are normally a pretty dependable crop, but between the cool weather deer attacks, they either never ripened or were sunburned from a lack of leaf canopy.

Overall, this was a great year for all things leafy and the root crops, but a tough one for fruiting plants that need warmer and drier weather. This winter is forecasted to be another wet one, let's cross our fingers for a warmer, drier summer next year!

From The Field, Ryan

Lauch mit Sahne und Nuessen – German Leeks

1 bunch Leeks
 ½ C Cream or Half-N-Half
 ¼ C Broth or Stock
 ½ C Walnuts, Toasted & Chopped
 2tsp Sesame Seeds (optional)
 1 T Lemon Juice
 1 T Fresh Oregano or ½ tsp Dried Oregano
 ¾ C Rice
 Nutmeg
 ¾ C Gruyère or Emmental Cheese, Grated

Cook rice. Preheat oven to 350°.

While the rice cooks, clean the leeks and slice them diagonally, forming slanted rounds about an inch or so in width. Toast and chop the nuts.

When rice is fully cooked, mix it with the herbs and a pinch each of freshly grated nutmeg and cheese. Wet your hands, then form patties with the rice mixture and place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake rice cakes until cheese is melted and the underside crisps, about 25 minutes.

While the rice cakes bake, heat some olive oil in a skillet. Add the leeks and sauté for 2 minutes uncovered, then cover with lid and cook for another 5 minutes. Add the broth, cream, lemon juice and a pinch of salt. Simmer uncovered for 10-15 minutes, until leeks are soft and sweet.

Serve over rice cakes from the oven, with walnuts, sesame and cheese sprinkled on top.

Applesauce

3 – 4 lbs Apples
 4 strips of lemon peel
 Juice of One Lemon
 3 in. Cinnamon Stick
 ¼ C Dark Brown Sugar
 ¼ C White Sugar
 1 C Water
 ½ tsp Salt

Peel, core and quarter apples. Remove zest of lemon using a veggie peeler to get 4 long strips.

Combine all ingredients in a large pot. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer for 20-30 minutes.

Remove from heat. Remove cinnamon stick and lemon peels. Mash with a potato masher.

Serve hot or refrigerated. Home made applesauce will last for a year in the freezer.

You can decrease the amount of white sugar in this recipe if you'd prefer it less sweet, but reduce lemon juice just as much to balance.

Fried Egg & Kale Toast

For each Breakfasting Person:

1 Large Egg
 1 Generous Handful Tuscan Kale
 1 Clove Garlic, Minced
 Juice of ½ a Lemon
 1 tsp Butter
 1 tsp Olive Oil
 1 Slice Bread, Sourdough or Rye
 Parmigian-Reggiano (optional)
 Salt & Pepper

Destem the kale, then tear or chop it into bite-sized pieces. Toast your bread using your preferred toasting method.

Place a skillet over medium-high heat and add the butter and oil to the skillet, and swirl to combine and spread the mixture evenly over the pan.

In one half of the pan, place the kale, garlic, and lemon juice. On the other side of the pan, crack the egg. As the egg cooks, move the kale about to ensure that all of it wilts and gets slightly blistered.

When the egg is cooked to your preferred standard, top the toasted bread with the kale and then the fried egg. Sprinkle with salt and freshly-cracked black pepper (Evelyn likes to put a little fresh parmesan on hers, but I like mine cheese-free). Repeat for each additional breakfaster.

Slightly modified from original recipe at thekitchn.com