

# AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Summer 2010 / Week 12 of 13

Editor: Nina Altshul

**Planned harvest:** Verdolaga (Purslane), Kohlrabi, Chiles (Arizona 20's), Sweet Potatoes, Beets, Summer Squash, Carrots, Melons

**Sign-up for the Fall 2010 session is now open.** The cost will be \$240 for 13 weeks, and can be paid in two installments. The gas money contribution will be calculated at the beginning of the session, but we expect it to be \$4/wk. Please register by Aug. 25, as the new session will start on Sept. 1.

Stay tuned for more events, including the Solar Mesquite Workshop at the International Day of Peace Community Breakfast on Sept. 19 in cooperation with the U of A Extension!

**Eggplant**, *Solanum melongena*, is the only edible member of the nightshade family native to the Old World. Nina elaborates on this fact, as well as on the eggplant's origin and its nutritional qualities, in her article *Eggplants: Glorious Globes or Insane Apples?*, which you can find through the link "About Eggplants" under the Recipes section of the Ajo CSA website ([www.ajocsa.com](http://www.ajocsa.com)). As I only recently developed an appreciation for this fruit, I have enjoyed learning how to store, handle, and incorporate eggplant into my culinary exploits. When storing eggplant, keep in mind that it prefers the rather inconvenient temperature of 50°F. Though most refrigerators are colder than this, eggplant will keep about a week when wrapped in a towel (to absorb moisture) and placed in a refrigerator vegetable drawer.

One concern about cooking eggplant is its almost characteristic bitterness caused by the presence of alkaloids in the seeds. Fortunately for us, this bitterness only tends to develop after being stored for a while, so our farm-fresh varieties should lack this taste. Should you be using other produce, salting peeled eggplant will remove the bitter flavor. When salting, cut the fruit into the desired sized pieces and place in a colander. Add salt and let rest for 15 to 30 minutes before removing excess water with a towel. This step also makes the fruit less watery and more absorbent so it can simply be used to enhance the dish.

Besides being baked in its jacket coated with olive oil, as described below, eggplant tastes wonderful sautéed, grilled, and roasted. Sauté 1-inch cubes of eggplant in oil until it has released much of its water and is soft. Broil or grill ½ to 1-inch thick slices of eggplant brushed with olive oil or butter until both sides are brown. Roast 1-inch cubes of eggplant tossed in oil and salt at 375°F until soft and brown. When seasoning, basil, oregano, parsley, rosemary, savory, thyme, curry, and pepper pair well with eggplant. Also enjoy eggplant with other vegetables like onions, potatoes, summer squash, and tomatoes!

**Purslane**, *Portulaca oleracea*, is an annual, old-world succulent also known as verdolaga, pigweed, little hogweed, and pusley. While Farmer Frank does not actively cultivate purslane, he takes advantage of this beneficial weed's tenacity as it fosters healthy soil and supports crop root development. Up to 40 cm in height, purslane provides substantial ground cover, creating a relatively humid microclimate and stabilizing ground moisture. Its deep roots draw water and nutrients up towards the surface of the ground and often facilitate crop root penetration through hard soil.

Purslane stems, leaves, and flowers are all edible, with a salty, sour taste. Rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin A, calcium, potassium and antioxidants, purslane can be eaten as a leafy green vegetable. Treat it as you would spinach, cooked or raw. Purslane's mucilaginous quality makes it a great thickening agent in stews and soups, like the one below!

- Stephanie Doerries

# RECIPES ETC.

## **Garlic, Chickpea, and Purslane Soup**

(adapted from *Vegetarian* by Linda Fraser)

2 Tbsp olive oil  
4 garlic cloves, crushed  
1 onion, roughly chopped  
2 tsp ground cumin  
2 tsp ground coriander  
5 cups vegetable stock  
12 ounces potatoes, peeled and finely chopped  
15-ounce can chickpeas, drained  
1 Tbsp cornstarch  
¾ cup heavy cream  
2 Tbsp tahini  
7 ounces purslane, shredded  
cayenne pepper  
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cook the garlic and onion in oil in a large saucepan for 5 minutes, or until they are softened and golden brown. Stir in the cumin and coriander and cook for another minute. Pour in the stock and add the chopped potatoes to the pan. Bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the chickpeas and simmer for 5 minutes more, or until the potatoes and chickpeas are just tender. Blend together the cornstarch, cream, tahini, and plenty of seasoning. Stir into the soup with the purslane. Bring to a boil, stirring, and simmer for another 2 minutes. Adjust seasoning if necessary. Serve immediately, sprinkled with a little cayenne pepper.

## **Food demo recipes (8/18/10):**

### **Caramelized Onions**

(from Simply Recipes <http://simplyrecipes.com>)

several medium or large onions, yellow, white, or red (about 5 large raw onions yield 2 cups caramelized onions)  
olive oil  
butter (optional)  
salt  
sugar (optional)  
balsamic vinegar or wine (optional)

Slice off the root and top ends of the onions, peel, and cut in half. Lay the onions cut side down and slice lengthwise to desired thickness. Use a wide, thick-bottomed sauté pan for maximum pan contact with the onions. Coat the bottom of a hot pan with olive oil, or a mixture of olive oil and butter (about 1 teaspoon per onion). Add the onion slices and stir to coat the onions with the oil. Spread the onions out evenly over the pan and let cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. After 10 minutes, sprinkle some salt over the onions, and if desired, add sugar to help with the caramelizing process (about 1 tsp of sugar for 5 onions, or to taste). Let cook for 30 minutes to an hour more, stirring every few minutes. As soon as the onions start sticking to the pan, let them stick a little and brown, but stir them before they burn. The trick is to leave them alone enough to brown (if you stir them too often they won't brown), but not so long so that they burn. After the first 20 to 30 minutes you may want to lower the stove temperature and add more oil if you find the onions are close to burning. Continue to cook and scrape until the onions are a rich, browned color. At the end of the cooking process you might want to add a little balsamic vinegar or wine to help deglaze the pan and bring some additional flavor to the onions. Store refrigerated for several days in an air-tight container.

## **Butternut Squash Risotto**

(from Williams-Sonoma Kitchen)

7 Tbsp unsalted butter  
2 tsp dried sage (or 2 Tbsp minced fresh sage)  
6 cups vegetable or chicken stock  
2 cups cooked butternut purée (bake whole squash for 1 hr at 375°F or until soft and then purée)  
2 Tbsp olive oil  
¾ cup caramelized onions (see instructions below)  
2 cups Arborio rice  
1 tsp dried rosemary (or 1 Tbsp minced fresh rosemary)  
½ cup dry white wine  
½ cup grated Parmesan-Reggiano (or just Parmesan) cheese  
salt and freshly ground pepper (to taste)

In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt 4 Tbsp of the butter. Add 1 tsp (or 1 Tbsp if using fresh) of the sage and heat until the butter browns. Cover the bowl to keep the butter warm. In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, whisk together the stock and squash purée. Bring just to a simmer for 8 to 10 minutes, and maintain over low heat. Warm the olive oil in a large saucepan or risotto pan over medium heat. Add the caramelized onions and rice and stir until the grains are well coated with the oil and are nearly translucent with a white dot in the center (about 3 minutes). Stir in the remaining 1 Tbsp sage and all the rosemary. Add the wine and stir until absorbed. Add the simmering stock mixture a ladleful at a time, stirring frequently after each addition. Wait until the stock is almost completely absorbed before adding more. When the rice is tender to the bite but slightly firm in the center and looks creamy (about 30 minutes), stir in the remaining 3 Tbsp butter, the cheese, salt, and pepper. Add more stock if needed so the rice is thick and creamy. Let stand for 2 minutes. Drizzle with the reserved sage butter and serve immediately. Enjoy!

## **Baba Ghanouj**

(from *Farmer John's Cookbook* by Farmer John Peterson and Angelic Organics)

3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil, divided  
2 medium eggplants (about 1½ pounds)  
¼ cup walnuts, chopped, or pine nuts  
¼-½ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (1 - 1½ large lemons)  
½ cup tahini  
1 - 2 cloves garlic, minced (½ - 1 tsp)  
1 tsp cumin  
½ tsp salt  
¼ tsp cayenne pepper  
3 Tbsp chopped fresh cilantro or parsley

Preheat oven to 375°F. Rub 1 Tbsp of the oil over the whole eggplants and place them on a baking sheet. Roast, turning once or twice, until very soft (30 - 45 minutes depending on size). Let cool. Meanwhile, toast the walnuts or pine nuts in a dry, heavy skillet until they start to brown in spots and become fragrant. Be careful not to overtoast them, as they will burn very quickly once toasted. Immediately transfer the nuts to a dish to cool. Cut the eggplants in half and scoop out the flesh. Purée the eggplant flesh in a food processor or finely chop it on a cutting board. Transfer to a bowl. Add the lemon juice, tahini, garlic, cumin, salt, cayenne, and the remaining 2 Tbsp of olive oil. Mix until well combined. Transfer to a serving bowl and garnish with cilantro or parsley and the toasted nuts. Baba ghanouj makes a wonderful dip for pita bread and veggies or as a filling in sandwiches and burritos. Enjoy!