

AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Winter 2008/09 / Week 11 of 12

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Planned harvest: I'toi Onions, Dandelion Greens, English Peas, White Turnips, Purple Cabbage, Red LaSoda Potatoes, Citrus, Braising Greens Mix.

The **Farm Picnic** is this Sunday, February 22, from 11 to 2 pm! Come see where and how your veggies grow. Members and friends are welcome. There will be a tour of the field led by Farmer Frank, followed by food prepared on the premises. Children are welcome, and there will be little train rides for them. The event is free of charge.

The farm is located near 19th Ave. & I-17. The drive from Ajo to the farm takes about two hours. Directions: take Dead Cow Road (Maricopa Road) to I-10 West / follow I-10 to I-17/Hwy 60 / follow I-17 to the 19th Ave. exit / take an immediate left, go under the freeway, then another immediate left, getting on the access road rather than back on the freeway going east / turn right at 16th Ave. / take another right at Watkins.

The entrance to the farm will be on your right (just before the big gravel pile). You can park near the gravel pile. I suggest we carpool from Ajo, so meet in front of our house (regular pick-up place) at 8:30 am on Sunday morning. We will depart at 8:45 am.

Spring Season Sign-Up: A full share will be \$240, and half shares and half-season shares (6 weeks) are available upon prior agreement. Gas money will be determined after this Friday, and checks for the farm are due by the end of February.

An interview with "Farmer Frank" Martin – Part 2

How can you grow produce without any chemicals?

The key to growing things naturally is observation. On one of Frank's first farms, people used to spray a lot; when he took the farm over he was told that he wouldn't be able to grow there without using pesticides because of the heavy infestation of army worms that mostly attack beets. He went ahead and grew his first beets, which had worm rings around them. He tried to sell them as organic but as he says, "people still buy with their eyes," and want their veggies to look good, so he decided to abandon the beets, and ordered his man to disk-till the soil. Once the disking was done, Frank noticed that thousands of birds suddenly flew in and started eating the worms. He left the field disked overnight, and repeated the disking and resting it a few more times, and eventually the army worms were gone. "You try to observe what is going on," says Frank. He also selects his plants with an eye to sustaining healthy soil and helpful fauna, for example ladybugs, which are known for eating the "bad guys" (although few people know that they only do that in their larval stage and not when they mature). Now, Frank says, "you can go and buy buckets of

ladybugs at places like Home Depot, but you can't actually buy ladybugs, you can only rent them – ladybugs are like homing pigeons, they will always return to where they were hatched, or at least try to, so they will leave your garden as soon as you release them if there is no reason for them to stay. You can buy ladybug eggs on a piece of paper, and hatch them in your garden, but then you have to provide food for them to stay. The nectar of certain types of plants is what keeps them put—arugula, dill, mustard—and that's why he not only plants certain things but also lets them go to seed in the field, so that the adult ladybugs can feed, and therefore stay. "You see, there is a method to our madness," he says with a smile.

Why do you farm in urban Phoenix, in the industrial part and near the Interstate?

The main reason is that there is simply not a lot of farmland left around Phoenix. Most of it was sold to agribusiness and developers in the 90s. The central location [where we do our weekly pick-ups] has been farmed at least since the introduction of the Salt River Project in 1918-1920, but probably goes all the way back to Native Americans. This farm

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used to be bigger too; the interstate only came in the 70s. The most important thing in his choice to farm here was that it is here, and when farmers stop farming land, it ceases to exist as farmland.

What is his biggest pest problem?

In spring, aphids appear and last a few weeks, then are gone; they attack plants as they weaken, such as kale going to the end, so he lets them take such plants and just stops harvesting them, and then the ladybugs come in and eat the aphids. Everything has its purpose, he adds.

Where does he get his seeds?

He gets the majority of his seeds from Johnny's Selected Seeds and the Baker Creek Company (rareseeds.com), which sells rare, open-pollinated seeds. Heirlooms are now gaining in popularity as people understand why they are better, and they also have fascinating histories, so he also grows some varieties such as the Cushaw Squash. He also saves seeds and plants them.

Does he sell at farmers markets?

Yes, you can find Crooked Sky Farms products at 3 different markets in Phoenix. He accepts WIC-USA vouchers, but only at farmer's markets.

What does he do to enrich his soil?

He makes some of his own compost, but he can't make enough, so he also buys organic compost. He also takes care of his soil with what he plants; for example, he plants wheat (remember those wheatberries?) which creates a mat of roots underneath the ground, which adds humus to the soil. Another example is planting legumes, which fix nitrogen in the soil.

Does he have any bees?

Bees come to his farm naturally, since he grows things for them; he only really needs bees in the summertime to pollinate plants like squash, cucumber etc. and he grows sunflowers to attract them even more.

- You can ask Farmer Frank more questions at the picnic on Sunday.

My Mom's Old World Dandelion Salad

In many parts of Europe, dandelion greens are welcomed as the first greens of the season, and are often foraged in the wild. They taste like chicory and endive, with a bit of a bitter tinge at the end, and can be eaten raw in salads (some people wash them in salt water in order to reduce the bitterness) or sauté and cook like any harder greens. They are esteemed for their high vitamin and mineral content and cleansing medicinal properties.

Wash and cut the greens into smaller pieces and set aside. For dressing, mix 2 Tbsp. olive or pumpkin-seed oil with 1 teaspoon of cider vinegar diluted with 1 Tbs. of water, and add salt and freshly ground pepper to taste. Cook 3 small potatoes and slice them into the greens while still warm. Pour the dressing over the warm potatoes and greens, and mix. The warmth from the potatoes will slightly wilt the greens and tame their bitterness. For an extra treat, substitute the oil with some pan-fried bacon or pancetta and added to potatoes and greens while still hot.

Braising Greens Mix and Orange Salad

A peppery mixture of young arugula and mustard mix with sweet orange and balsamic vinegar go perfectly together in this Tuscan-inspired recipe. To segment the orange, peel the fruit with a knife, cutting away the peel as well as the pith. Remove the individual segments by cutting between segments in a v-shape towards the center of the fruit.

1 bunch braising greens mix (chop roughly if using large leaves; you can use other greens like dandelion as well)

1 orange, cut into segments (or use grapefruit, tangelo, etc.)

1 small handful thinly sliced P'itoni onions

2 teaspoons olive oil

2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Chopped pecans or walnuts

Parmesan cheese, shaved or grated

Add orange and all the other ingredients to the greens, and toss to coat.