

AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Summer 2009 / Week 4 of 13

Editor: Nina Altshul Layout: Peter Altshul

Planned harvest: Melons (assorted), Tomatoes (double share), Summer Squash (assorted), Sweet Potatoes, Verdolagas (Purslane), Armenian Cucumbers, Banana Peppers.

What's so great about CSAs? There's plenty of food available in Ajo and elsewhere – why should anyone bother buying their produce from a CSA?

There are a lot of choices nowadays, but most commercial options lead you to one or more of the four major problems with modern foods. Those problems are 1) processing 2) pesticides, particularly petroleum-based 3) monoculture and 4) transportation. There is plenty of information available about why all of these are things we should avoid when making our food choices, but briefly, processing in general lowers the nutritional value of the foods, and most processed foods contain sweeteners, salts, artificial flavors, factory-created fats, colorings, texture-altering chemicals and preservatives, none of which (except perhaps natural salts) are part of a healthy diet. Petroleum-based pesticides are simply biodetrimental poisons, and no matter what the chemical companies might tell you, they are not good for you. In addition, according to a recent edition of the journal *Science*, food and energy production are causing reactive nitrogen to accumulate in soil, water, the atmosphere and coastal waters, contributing to the greenhouse effect, smog, haze, acid rain, coastal “dead zones” and ozone depletion. So – bad for you, bad for the planet. Monoculture is a modern agricultural practice where only a single type of plant is raised on a large area. This agribusiness-driven concept promotes loss of plant diversity, which in turn leads to loss of dietetic diversity. As a result, your immune system has to rely on fewer naturally-occurring compounds as its building-blocks, and is therefore less capable of reacting to a wide variety of inputs. Transportation gives us strawberries in January, but at what cost? Together with petroleum-based pesticides and fertilizers, our rate carbon of carbon consumption for food production and transport alone is threatening to make the concept of sustainable anything a lost cause.

So what can we do? Perhaps not that much, but you've got to start somewhere, and CSAs provide an alternative to a large part of the problems listed above. First of all, you do all of your own processing – you know where your food comes from, who grew it, and what's in it. Putting a face on your food is important – if you can't, you simply don't know where it's been. Second, most CSA farms are either organic or “beyond organic” – Crooked Sky Farms for example uses no pesticides, and only organic fertilizers and compost. Monoculture is simply not effective for CSA farms, since they have to supply a wide variety of produce throughout the growing season. And finally, with the average food product in the US travelling 1500 miles from source to shelf, our 200 mile weekly round trip to Phoenix, while not ideal, amounts to a fraction of the transportation footprint that most store-bought items have.

There are other important reasons as well. Farming is an important skill that is being lost through mechanization and technology. Anybody who has ever tried to grow an organic vegetable garden will know how difficult it is to deal with the various kinds of pests and blights that can affect your crop. So your farmer is a significant source of knowledge about how to maintain soil, flora and fauna so that it will continue to produce sustainably. Technology alone is no substitute for this. For that matter, many people believe that we rely exclusively on technology at our peril. On top of that, real vegetables have real tastes, not the kind that McDonald's has programmed into us. And speaking of McDonald's, CSA food is never wrapped in disposable packaging. Furthermore, CSAs are a way for small and medium-size farms to be sustainable – farmers markets are great, but it is very hard to keep a farm going without a distribution network, and CSAs allow farmers to put their profits back into the farm instead of losing them to wholesalers.

These are just some of the reasons that make the CSA model a good one. Real food produced by people in the community makes for healthier people and healthier communities. – *Peter Altshul*

Melon of the Week: the Sun Jewel is an Asian specialty. The unusual 7" x 3½" oblong fruits are lemon yellow with shallow white sutures. The flesh is white, crisp when ripe, wonderfully sweet and uniquely delicious!

RECIPES ETC.

Nina's Potatoes and Verdolagas

Boil the potatoes, cubed. Fry some onion, add some green or red tomatoes (optional), then the potatoes, salt and pepper. Add washed and chopped verdolagas (purslane), and heat through (about 3-5 min). Add a few drops of lemon juice (optional) and serve warm or at room temperature.



*Melon
tasting
at the
pick-up.*

Quick Honeydew Sorbet Recipe

(adapted from Crooked Sky Farms' website)

Peel, cut up and freeze your melon and you can have this easy sorbet any time you like.

4 cups frozen honeydew
1-2 cups apple juice
1 handful fresh mint (optional)
Sugar, as desired

Using the pulse button, mix melon and 1 cup apple juice in a food processor or blender. Add more liquid as needed to make a soft sorbet. Add sugar, if needed, and serve immediately.

Short-Term Cucumber-Onion Pickles

(adapted from Deborah Madison's Local Flavors)

2/3 cups white wine or apple cider vinegar
1/3 cup sugar
pinch salt
2 onions (any color)
2 cups thinly sliced cucumbers, peeled only if skins are tough
a few lovage leaves, fennel greens, or dill sprigs
1 teaspoon mixed whole peppercorns
3 Tbsp olive oil

Mix the vinegar, sugar, and salt and set aside, stirring occasionally, until the sugar is dissolved. Thinly slice the onions into rounds, then toss them with the cucumbers, herbs, and peppercorns in a noncorrosive bowl. Add the oil to the vinegar, stir well, then pour over the vegetables. Toss well, then cover and refrigerate. It's best if the pickles can sit for a day before being used. These pickles will keep for about 5 days in the refrigerator.

Stuffed Squash with Black-Bean and Green Chile Rice

(submitted by Marilee Williams, adapted from Vegan Food – More than Tofu and Sprouts blog)

Cut the tops off two large (baseball-size) patty-pan squash. Scoop insides out leaving 1/2 inch "shell". Fill with rice filling.

1 cup cooked brown rice
1/2 cup drained black beans
1/4 cup chopped, roasted green chiles
1/4 cup chopped onion
1/4 cup chopped tomato
3 cloves garlic, pressed
2 Tbsp fresh minced cilantro
2 Tbsp your favorite salsa
1/2 Tbsp oil
salt, pepper, cumin, garlic powder to taste
vegan "cheese" as garnish (or substitute regular cheese of choice)

Saute chiles, onions and garlic in oil until onions are soft. Add tomatoes, salsa, black beans and seasonings. Simmer until tomatoes soften. Add rice and stir until heated through. Check seasonings and adjust if needed. Season inside of squashes with salt, pepper and red pepper as desired. Pack filling into hollowed out squashes. Set squash in baking dish. Top with cheese if desired. Bake for 45 min. at 375° degrees or until squash is soft - put broiler on for a moment if cheese isn't melted. Sprinkle with red pepper and chives to garnish.

Editor's note: any other type of big summer squash would work as well – just cut off the tops horizontally, and make "boats". You can also add some roasted chicken pieces for a meatier dish.