

What did you do with your produce share? - Week 2

Hi all,

- About the cucumbers (from Tucson CSA's website:
<http://www.tucsoncsa.org/2006/08/20/bio-armenian-cucumber/>):

“We are privileged to receive from Farmer Frank what are known as Armenian cucumbers, specifically adapted to our desert conditions. They come in two varieties: the pale green ribbed variety and the darker green striped and crooked variety. Not surprisingly, the latter is also known as snake melon. The online Cook's Thesaurus (www.foodsubs.com) notes they are “hard to find, but one of the best-regarded slicing cucumbers.” Not hard to find for us!

According to a report by the Environmental Working Group, commercial cucumbers are one of the top twelve most pesticide-laden produce items. The wax applied to commercial cucumbers, apples, and many other produce items is made of petroleum oils. Not only does it seal in moisture, prolonging shelf life, it also seals in pesticides.

Armenian cucumbers don't need to be peeled or seeded, and despite their limpid appearance, you'll notice that they're still crisp when sliced. As soon as you slice one, the perfumed aroma begs you to take a bite. And when you do, you won't be disappointed. You'll be amazed at how little it resembles the flavorless, tough-skinned varieties you're used to. You could use slices of this cucumber to perfume and brighten mixed drinks, lemonade, or even plain water, or simply eat it with a light sprinkling of salt.”

In addition to serving them as a salad (Betsy uses vinegar and a bit of sugar and lets them stand for an hour or so, so that they get slightly pickled), or a salad or sandwich ingredient, a snack for scooping dips (like hummus with grilled onions, see below), or in *raita* (Indian yogurt dish with minced cucumber and cumin), I also make my mom's Slovenian cucumber sauce. Start by grating the cucumbers and squeezing out the excess water. Fry some chopped onion and garlic in olive oil, add the cucumbers and chopped tomatoes (can be from a can), salt and pepper and cook for about 20 min. If it looks dry, add some water. Then mix a tablespoon of corn starch (or arrowroot) with a few tablespoons of sour cream and water in a separate cup, and slowly add to the cucumber sauce. Cook on low heat for about 5 more minutes. Traditionally this sauce would be served with steamed green beans and pork crackling alongside a piece of beef, but it also goes wonderfully with mashed potatoes or just about anything.

- Onions: In addition to all other uses, I like to grill them whole, still in the peel, then peel them and use them as a topping for a Cinque Terre (Liguria)-style pizza. Spread some olive oil on the dough, cover with Italian-style grated cheeses or just mozzarella, spread the onion and (pre-cooked) potato slices, I also added a chopped fresh tomato, salt, pepper and Italian style seasoning or garlic, cover with a little more cheese and bake. I also made a frittata: mix chopped potato (the red ones, another left-over) and onion with eggs, a splash of milk, and spices to your liking, and perhaps some cheese, put in a low pie dish and bake in the oven for about 25 min at 375; you

can also add some chopped and sautéed greens to the egg mix before baking, or they go splendidly well served on the side, sautéed in olive oil with some garlic.

Grilled onions go wonderfully into hummus as well: start by putting a can of garbanzo beans in a blender, add tahini (optional), olive oil, some cumin, chopped garlic, lemon or lime juice, salt, pepper and some chili (if you like). Blend to a desired consistency, transfer to a bowl, and mix in chopped grilled onion with a spoon.

Grilling onions is also a wonderful shortcut for onion soup, which traditionally requires at least an hour or so of slowly sautéing sliced onions in a pan so that they become sweet. Inspired by the wonderful Nigel Slater, I grill the onions for about 45 min to an hour (but on a grill they do not need much attention, and they don't heat up your kitchen and fill it with onion smell), peel them and chop them, add to heated olive oil, and top with a good broth (chicken, beef or veggie, can also use water and bouillon cubes), not too much though! I like to add some garlic as well. Then I spice it with salt, marjoram (or a mix of Provencal spices) and pepper. Keep on a low boil for about 15 min, and it's done! I also puree half of the soup in the blender and add it back to the rest of the soup so that it gets a creamy consistency with an intensified taste. For an extra filling meal, I top slices of bread with cheese and put in the oven until it bubbles and add to the bowls of soup.

- My favorite easy way to prepare artichokes is to steam them whole and then serve them as an appetizer with individual plates for olive oil, balsamic vinegar, salt, pepper and any other spice I feel like having. Just peel your 'choke and dip the leaves in the mixture as you go. Betsy steamed hers and served them with clam sauce and linguine.

If you need more inspiration for recipes, check <http://www.tucsonsa.org/recipes/>.

Best,

Nina