

AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Spring 2009 / Week 3 of 13

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Planned harvest: Spring Mix, Arugula, Spinach, Carrots, I'toi Onions, Peas, Cabbage, Citrus.

Report from the Farm: The aphid season is here! Aphids are small, greenish, sap-sucking insects, mostly attacking leafy vegetables like Asian greens, kale and cabbage. The height of the aphid attack lasts about two to three weeks when the weather is pleasant, that is not too cold or too warm. The severity of the attack is different every year, and you will probably see some in your shares to come. To deal with this problem, Frank does not use any pesticides but only natural pest control methods, such as introducing or encouraging natural aphid predators such as lacewing and ladybug larvae. These take more time before any results are seen but Frank reports that they have a lot of ladybugs hard at work already. If you spot any aphids on your greens or are concerned about them, a good rinse under running water, especially where the leaves curl up at edges, will get rid of most, and then a short soaking and a swish in water with a touch of salt, mild soap or vinegar should get the rest. In addition, the farm is starting to move away from the affected crops and switching to other crops such as beets and carrots. Artichokes are coming soon too. Rhubarb, unfortunately, did not do well this year, but the young asparagus patch at the farm is doing great, and next year we can expect a lot of asparagus at this time of the year too. Otherwise, the farm is now going through "March madness": they are working overtime to get all the summer crops into the ground in time. Corn was planted last week, and some stalks are already few inches high! Tomatoes, melons and squash seeds are also being put in the ground as we speak. Frank has some things in the greenhouse too, especially tomatoes, chilies, peppers, tobacco, radicchio, tomatillos and watermelons, so if any of our members are interested they can get potting plants as part of their CSA share.

The challenging aspects of CSA (Part 1): So we joined a CSA, and are enjoying healthy, nutritious produce while moving towards living sustainably and locally, knowing that we foster a healthy farming ecosystem with a rich biodiversity, and less use of water than conventional agriculture, supporting farm crew health, saving fossil fuel, enjoying creative cooking with a fridge always full of fresh produce and saving money and time for shopping. Not to mention all the fun we have with other members! However, there are aspects to a CSA which can be challenging. Some of these aspects, such as bugs, difference in size and appearance of produce, quality variation and shorter shelf-life, are inherent to small scale organic farming, and others more a matter of convenience or personal likes and dislikes. Here are some of the major challenges as I see them, and tips on how to deal with them:

1. **Time.** One thing becomes clear to all members very quickly: one has to be prepared to invest some time in produce preparation and/or cooking. When you bring your share home after the pick-up, the best thing to do is to first take some time on Friday evening (or as soon as you can) and sort through your produce. Decide what needs to be used first and what can wait for a while, and plan your weekly menu appropriately. Decide what needs to be put in the refrigerator. Separate the roots from the edible leaves, and store them separately; wash the greens, dry them and store in a plastic bag with a paper towel in the fridge; store citrus and potatoes in a cold and dark place; wash and clean the green onions and store in a plastic bag with a paper towel; carrots store well and do not go limp if you give them a rinse, whether you choose to separate them from the greens or not. Preparing foods like this saves a lot of time and focuses your awareness on what you have in your fridge. If you do not have time to research recipes, try using your share veggies in your favorite familiar recipes, for example substituting some of the potatoes in mashed potatoes with turnips, broccoli or carrots. Also, when cooking and using up your veggies, do not be afraid of the leftovers: for example, braised greens which did not get eaten freeze great; so do soups, stews, casseroles. Or consider making a quiche, pie, burritos etc. stuffed with veggies, and freeze portions for time-saving future use.

2. **Upfront payment and cost.** The CSA is unusual in the sense that it requires you to pay for your produce in advance. This, of course, is how we support the farmer, by providing operating capital up front and a guaranteed market at harvest time. Commitment to the CSA idea requires this shift in food-buying habits. After the initial

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payment is made, you can pick up your share for 13 weeks with no further payment. Plus, price checks for organic produce at grocery stores can confirm that CSA prices are lower. In addition, we believe that CSA produce is often better — produce that is harvested only when ripe and delivered immediately to you generally tastes better and is more nutritious. Members who rely primarily on the food from their CSA share(s) find that their grocery bills decrease. If you are experiencing cash flow issues, start a CSA savings account by putting aside \$20 a week. And remember that your investment not only gives you food, it helps a local farmer who is committed to environmental issues and social justice. (*Cont. next week.*)

Honeyed Ginger Carrots

(submitted by Maddy Huff)

Put 4 cups of sliced carrots, 3 Tbs. of orange juice and 3 Tbs. of butter in a pot, add a bit of salt to taste, ¼ teaspoon of ground (or fresh) ginger and 2 Tbs. of honey. Cover the pot and cook nice a low until carrots are tender and yummy. If you want less water and more glaze, experiment with reducing the liquid. Substitute mild tasting vegetable oil for butter, and agave syrup for honey for a vegan version.

Swiss Chard and Pasta

(submitted by Mimi Adams)

1 can flat anchovy filets in oil, chopped (reserve oil)
6 TBSP olive oil (approx.)
1 large bunch chard
8-10 cloves garlic, chopped
1/2 - 1 tsp dried hot chili pepper flakes
1 large bunch Swiss chard, chopped
1 lb pasta
1/4 - 1/2 Cup broth
fresh ground black pepper
Romano or parmesan cheese

While pasta is cooking in salted water prepare sauce as follows: (Use wok or large pan to cook sauce.)

In wok heat anchovy oil & olive oil, then smash anchovies in & half of the garlic. Add rest of the garlic, chard, chili pepper flakes & cook until chard is wilted. Drain pasta & place it in the wok & add the broth & black pepper, mixing well. Let sit a couple of minutes & serve with cheese.

Nina's CSA Slaw

½ head of cabbage (purple or green), thinly sliced
4 carrots, thinly sliced or grated
½ bunch of Yukina Savoy (or any other greens)

1 handful of fresh parsley and/or cilantro, chopped (optional)

Creamy Citrus-Herb Dressing

1 avocado
1 orange
2 cloves garlic
1 Tbs. olive oil
1½ lemon, juiced (or to taste)
1 tsp raw almond butter
1 tsp agave syrup
1 tsp salt (or to taste)
⅓ cup water (or more)

Blend until smooth. Add water until desired consistency is reached.

Mix the veggies and the dressing, and let stand for a few minutes before serving.

Brown Butter Gnocchi with Spinach and Pine Nuts (submitted by Jean Eddy)

1 (16-ounce) package vacuum-packed gnocchi
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons pine nuts
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 (10-ounce) package fresh spinach, torn
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup (1-ounce) finely shredded Parmesan cheese

Cook gnocchi according to package directions, omitting salt and fat; drain. Heat butter in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add pine nuts to pan; cook 3 min. or until butter and nuts are lightly browned, stirring constantly. Add garlic to pan; cook 1 min. Add gnocchi and spinach to pan; cook 1 min. or until spinach wilts, stirring constantly. Stir in salt and pepper. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.