

Ajo CSA Week 6 - What did you do with your produce share?

Why join a CSA?

On our recent trip to Slovenia, we stopped at an “eco farm” looking for fresh produce. It turned out that this particular farm did not grow anything for sale but served as a training facility for other organic farmers. However, the moment we happened to mention that we had moved from Slovenia to the US, the lady of the farm started accusing us of being stupid and making the biggest mistake of our lives, since all American food is genetically modified, grown with pesticides and herbicides, and all Americans are too stupid (and genetically altered from the very food they eat) to notice or even care. We tried to explain to her that that is not quite true, and what our group and other similar groups and organizations are doing all over the States, but then we just gave up and waved goodbye.

Leaving this incident behind, it did prompt me to compile a list of reasons why CSA projects are good:

- Our health and nutrition: CSA produce is naturally grown, without any chemicals. It is picked when ripe, at its maximal nutritional value, and it reaches us in less than 24 hours after harvest, so the nutrients haven’t had time to leach away.
- Environmental health: the farms we work with use sustainable farming methods that foster a healthy farming ecosystem with a rich biodiversity, and they use less water than conventional agriculture or urban developments.
- Farm crew health: farm crews are not exposed to chemicals; they benefit from year-round employment, fair wages, medical insurance and healthy working and living conditions.
- Supporting local farming: local family farms are vanishing from our landscapes. If we don’t support them, they will disappear to make room for more urban sprawl. CSA model honors the work, knowledge and experience of farmers, and encourages land stewardship and social justice.
- Creative cooking: enjoy cooking healthy meals with a great diversity of seasonal produce. Crooked Sky Farm grows over 200 different types of fruits and vegetables throughout the year. Your refrigerator is always stocked with fresh food and you spend less time planning your meals.
- Flavor! Vegetables and fruits grown naturally, picked just before the delivery and eaten when in season taste much better than almost anything bought in a store.
- Saving fossil fuel: it takes about ten calories of fossil fuel to produce one calorie of food in the average American diet; typical grocery store produce, even organic, travels an average of 1,500 miles from farm to table, or over 40 times the distance to our nearest farm.

- Connecting with your food: know who grows it, how it is grown and where it is grown. Learn the history and traditions of each vegetable you eat.
- Less expensive than store-bought organic produce. Actually, the price per share per season hasn't changed in at least 3 years because of the low dependence on gas, and independence from chemical pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, fertilizers, GM seeds etc. You also go shopping less frequently and are less inclined to buy processed and pre-packaged foods.
- Living more sustainably. As a CSA member, you take a personal and direct step in addressing the flaws of our global food system. By paying attention to what you eat, you participate in a more environmentally and socially sustainable way of life in a direct and rewarding way.
- Sense of place. By eating locally grown seasonal vegetables, you tune into the natural rhythms of the place you live in.
- Sense of community. In addition to fostering responsible relationships among members, the food we eat, the land on which it is grown and those who grow it, our Friday nights are a great social occasion for learning about vegetables and fruits, exchanging recipes, meeting new people and just hanging out.

What are some of your reasons? I will post a reading list in the next newsletter, so please make recommendations. Also, Tucson's Annual 2nd Green Festival will be held on Saturday, October 25, between 10 am and 3 pm at La Placita Village and the Tucson Convention Center Plaza. In addition to all kinds of eco-friendly exhibitors, food, workshops, speakers, demonstrations, entertainment, and family activities they are also promising the biggest farmer's market in town. For more info check out their website: <http://tucsongreenfestival.org/>.

MIZUNA

This week we received Mizuna (*Brassica juncea* var. *japonica*), which is a Japanese mustard green with dandelion-like jagged edge green leaves with a mild, sweet earthy flavor. It has been cultivated in Japan since ancient times, but most likely originated in China. It is also known as Xiu Cai, Kyona, Japanese Mustard, Potherb Mustard, Japanese Greens and California Peppergrass. Mizuna makes an excellent salad green, and is frequently found in mesclun. It is also used in stir-frys and soups or as a steamed dish. It contains vitamin C, folic acid, and antioxidants. And like other brassica vegetables, it contains glucosinolates, which may inhibit the development of certain cancers. Glucosinolates are the compounds that give brassicas, like Brussels sprouts and cabbage, their bitter flavor. (source: <http://www.foodreference.com/html/fmizuna.html>)

Morgana wanted to share with the group a dish she made with the wheat berries we received a couple of weeks ago. She says that it's pretty basic but tasty nonetheless....

Wheat Berry and Garden Tomato Salad

3 cups cooked wheat berries
4 cups coarsely chopped ripe tomatoes
1 1/2 cups cubed, seeded cucumber
1/2 cup sliced green onions and tops
1/4 cup finely chopped parsley
1/2 cup (2 ounces) crumbled feta cheese
salt and pepper to taste
roasted garlic vinaigrette (mix all ingredients below and refrigerate until serving time; mix again before using):
2-4 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons minced roasted garlic
1 teaspoon dried mint leaves
1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves

Combine wheat berries, veggies, parsley, and cheese in salad bowl; pour roasted garlic vinaigrette over and toss. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

And here is a recipe for the pumpkin cookies you tasted last Friday. I added an extra half a cup of pumpkin puree, which I made with the butternut squash we received in our shares, and I also omitted the glaze:

Old-Fashioned Soft Pumpkin Cookies

(Source: <http://www.verybestbaking.com/recipes/detail.aspx?ID=32364>)

Ingredients

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
1/2 cup butter (1 stick), softened
1 cup pumpkin puree
1 large egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Glaze (recipe follows)

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease baking sheets.

Combine flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt in medium bowl. Beat sugar and butter in large mixer bowl until well blended. Beat in pumpkin, egg and vanilla extract until smooth. Gradually beat in flour mixture. Drop by rounded tablespoon onto prepared baking sheets.

Bake for 15 to 18 minutes or until edges are firm. Cool on baking sheets for 2 minutes; remove to wire racks to cool completely. Drizzle Glaze over cookies.

For glaze combine 2 cups sifted powdered sugar, 3 tablespoons milk, 1 tablespoon melted butter and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract in small bowl until smooth.

Note: For a variation add 1/2 cup chocolate chips or nuts to the recipe.

Buon appetito!

Nina