

What did you do with your produce share? - Week 3 and 4

Hello all,

Last week we received verdolaga (or purslane) in our shares, and for those of you who are wondering....

Verdolaga is a plant, native to the Americas, that is harvested when it is young and used as an herb for seasoning, as a fresh green to be served in salads, or to be sauteed or cooked into soups. Purslane leaves have succulent, fleshy leaves and stems with a delicate and tangy flavor. Purslane is mostly known as an invasive weed. When wild, it produces a small leaf that is not as tender as when cultivated. Its mild and nutritious characteristics are valued by many cultures. Look for it at farmers' markets or ethnic groceries – or harvest it from your garden! Purslane is also known as verdolaga, pusley, gwa tsz tsai, or ngalog. Although purslane has proliferated as a wild edible around the world for centuries, it is currently acclaimed for not one, but two starring attractions: the rediscovery of its cooking possibilities—its tinker-toy eye appeal, crisp texture and lightly tangy taste—and the scientific discovery of its potentially healthful omega-3 fatty acids. If this weren't enough, it has above average values of Vitamins A and C and provides all of these goodies with only 15 calories in a 100-gram portion (as compared with 76 in a boiled potato). Researchers see evidence that these substances lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels as well as make the blood less likely to form clots. But ages before this scientific finding, purslane was eaten as treatment for arthritis, inflammation and heart disease and to promote general good health. (Sources: recipetips.com; gourmetsleuth.com)

Here are some recipes I found:

Honey Dijon Purslane and Red Potato Salad (By Heidi DeCosmo)

Makes 8 (1/2 cup) servings

1 pound Red La Soda potatoes cut into medium cubes

Olive Oil, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 cup chopped Purslane

1/4 cup thinly sliced red onion

1/4 cup chopped red bell pepper

Dressing

1/4 cup grain Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon honey

1 tablespoon seasoned rice wine vinegar

Place the potatoes in a large pot of water and bring to boil. Cook about 15 minutes or until the potatoes have softened. Drain.

In a large mixing bowl combine the potatoes, purslane, onion and peppers. In a small bowl combine the mustard, honey and vinegar. Add the dressing to the salad and mix well.

Purslane and Red Potatoes (Adapted from recipetips.com)

1 pound red potatoes, cut in chunks
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, chopped
1 cup (or more) purslane, chopped
2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons lemon zest (optional)
salt and pepper to taste

Heat olive oil over medium heat in heavy skillet large enough to hold potatoes in a single layer. Add potatoes and rosemary, salt and pepper lightly and cook without stirring for about 5 minutes, until bottoms begin to brown. Stir enough to turn potatoes, reduce heat to medium-low and cover. Cook until tender (easily pierced with a sharp knife) stirring once or twice, 10 to 15 minutes.

Toss cooked potatoes with lemon juice and mix in purslane. Sprinkle on lemon zest, if using, and serve warm or room temperature.

Verdolaga con Queso

1 quart purslane
1/2 cup Monterey Jack, shredded
1 tablespoon oil

Rinse purslane in fresh water. Steam or boil for 2-3 minutes or until tender. Drain and chop in 1-inch pieces.

Return to hot skillet with oil. Sprinkle cheese over it let it melt. Do not over-melt the cheese. Season to taste. Serve warm.

I made a frittata out of mine: Quickly fry the purslane with some onion and garlic, add beaten eggs with some Italian mixture cheese, salt and pepper and bake at 375° for a half hour.

In addition to lemon (yellow and round) and pickling cucumbers, this week we also received “funny beans.” They are called yardlong beans, and are also known as the long-podded cowpea, asparagus bean, snake bean, or Chinese long bean. This plant is of a different genus and is only distantly related to the common bean. It is a vigorous climbing annual vine. A variety of the cowpea, it is grown primarily for its strikingly long (35-75 cm) immature pods and has uses very similar to that of a green bean. The plant is subtropical/tropical and most widely grown in the warmer parts of Southeast Asia, Thailand, and Southern China (and is also well-suited to growing in our climate). Yardlong beans are quick-growing, and daily checking/harvesting is often a necessity. The crisp, tender pods are eaten both fresh and cooked, in stews or salads or on their own (source: Wikipedia). I cut mine into bite-size pieces and steamed them for about 10 minutes, and then added them to a Moroccan stew of eggplants, onions and squash.

Great ways to use eggplants: either make a ratatouille (slowly cook with onions and tomatoes for at least an hour) or grill them (e.g. marinated with oil, salt and garlic) or roast them in the oven, chopped with onions and garlic (and perhaps tomatoes). Once cooked like that you can use them for sauces with meat or pasta, blend them into a dip

(you can add some beans or chickpeas for more substance to the dip) or simply use them in a salad or a sandwich. Not to mention all the great eggplant curries...

On Friday, June 27, we went to see the main farm of Crooked Sky Farms, where we were met by Tania, our coordinator. She prepared a salad of fresh veggies and sliced some melons, and then we got a tour of the fields. Even though this is an urban farm, or maybe because of it, the fields were bursting with animal life among the plants, and we were allowed to harvest whatever we wanted. We asked Tania what they use to control the weeds she looked around and said, Larry!, and we also met Jeff, the truck driver. They also showed us the upcoming rucola (arugula) and basil plants and hinted we might get some soon in our weekly share. We also might get some more corn and okra soon while chili peppers will probably come in August. Later on, Farmer Frank joined us and answered questions about naturally-grown farming (a type of certification which is perhaps more organic than "organic," with lower costs for the farmer and actually more sustainable practices). We stayed at the farm for several hours, had to wash our muddy feet before we left, and were invited to come back in the fall when the winter crops are growing!

At this point we are up to 8 shares, and this week I will be picking them up on Friday, July 4 and hope to bring you your veggies by mid-afternoon. If you think you might not be at home please put a cooler (with some ice) in front of your door so that it will stay fresh after I drop off your share. Also, the little green baskets we have been getting our tomatoes and onions in can be recycled by the farm so please give them back to me.

Thanks and bon appetit, Nina