



Planned harvest: Red LaSoda Potatoes, Butternut Squash, Arugula, Collard Greens, Purple Bok Choi, I'toi Green Onions, Carrots, Swiss Chard.

Composting Basics by Karen Johnson

What is composting and why is it a good idea?

Composting is the oldest form of crop fertilization. It does for your garden what nature does elsewhere: returns consumed nutrients to the earth. As leaves fall and decay into humus, so our vegetable leavings are returned to enrich the garden through composting. It is simple to do, involves no chemicals, and turns what could be waste to a useful purpose. All vegetable material can be composted, including un-dyed fiber material such as brown napkins, egg shells, coffee grounds, cow and sheep manure (be mindful that horse stomachs do not digest weed seeds, and fresh hen dressing is too “hot”), wood ash (some, not a lot), leaves, hair, hulls, husks, seeds, and peels (although these take much longer to break down). Forbidden in the compost pile is meat, bones and bone meal, blood meal, chemicals, and human or pet feces (absolutely not!). No enhancers or starters are needed if the compost is well managed.

How does composting work?

There are several ways of composting. You can just bury your garbage, or create a compost bin employing either aerobic or anaerobic decomposition, or try the layering method. The easiest method is to dig a hole and bury your garbage directly in the garden. The rhizomes and bacteria in the soil take care of the matter in a few days. This method works best under ornamentals where the ground is undisturbed. Anaerobic (airless) composting is less common and, if not done properly, can turn rancid. If you put your garbage in a covered 50 gallon drum in the sun (drill a few holes in the side), you will get compost eventually, but when full you must leave it without adding to it until it is totally broken down. This works well for snowbirds. Most tumbler-type composters are anaerobic. They work best if you fill them and keep turning every day for at least a week without adding any new material before emptying and starting over.

Aerobic (open to the air) composting is most common. Usually a three-bin method is used. Bins may be made of block, pallets, fencing—whatever—and are open in the front. Compost material is moved through the three bins as they fill up. A hay fork works best. In the first bin the material begins to decay and is reduced in bulk. It will look rotted and black, but is not yet compost. (When bin one is turned into bin two, you can skim off the newest additions and throw that, plus any resistant materials such as egg shells, rinds, cobs, etc. back into bin one so they break down further.) Bin two is where the “cooking” happens. Although the vegetative matter will compost on its own, unless you have a lot of material it is helpful to alternate each layer of compost with a shovel full of dirt. It speeds the process to turn the material in the bins from time to time, although it is not vital that you do so. Bin three is where the compost rests until you need it. This bin should be lightly covered with a tarp so the nutrients don’t leach out. If your climate permits, grow worms here because the pile is cooler. To keep your compost healthy you need to water bins one and two, never allowing them to dry out – but don’t let them get soggy, either. Manure tea will jump-start the action. Just soak some manure in a bucket of water and pour it over the pile. Pile two should feel hot and slightly damp when you poke your hand down into it. You will know your pile is working when you turn it into bin three – it should be black and fluffy. Don’t be in a hurry. Let it work.

Another option is layering, which works particularly well for municipal or large-scale agriculture, or if you are starting a new garden. It is a form of burying, but more systematic. Dig trenches the length of your garden space and pile the dirt on one side of each trench as if you were planting an entire garden of potatoes or asparagus. As you fill the trench with garbage, throw a covering of dirt over it. In this case, you can add supplements as you go, such as crushed limestone (not slaked lime!), gypsum, rock phosphate, manure, hen dressing, seaweed, sawdust (not a lot), grass clippings, leaves, etc. After you have filled and covered all the trenches, let it sit over the winter (or for a month or so). When you fork it over by hand (no tillers to compact the soil) you will have good soil about a foot deep. If you get critters you’re not covering well enough.

RECIPES ETC.

Simple Collard Greens

(submitted by Sarah and Steven Howard)

Tear leaves from stems. One bunch from CSA makes enough for 2 people. Put in large pot and add chunk of salt pork about 3/4" x 1/2". Add 1" of water to pot, cover with lid, and cook slowly for two hours. Serve with corn bread.

Emeril's Grilled Tandoori Chicken

(submitted by Paul Ogdan)

1 (4 to 4 1/2 pound) Josh's chicken, cut into 8 pieces, skin removed
2 Tbsp vegetable oil
1/2 cup chopped white onion
2 Tbsp chopped garlic
2 Tbsp chopped ginger
1 tsp finely chopped serrano or jalapeno pepper, stem and seeds removed
1 Tbsp paprika
1 1/2 tsp salt
1 tsp cumin seed
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp coriander seed
1 tsp Garam Masala
1/2 tsp cayenne
1/2 cup plain yogurt
1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice

With a fork, prick holes in the chicken pieces. Using a knife, cut diagonal slices 1 inch apart, and 1/2-inch deep into the larger pieces. Place the chicken in a baking dish. In a spice grinder, combine paprika, salt, cumin seed, turmeric, coriander seed, Garam Masala and cayenne. Grind into a powder.

In a blender, combine the oil, onion, garlic, ginger, pepper, and process on high speed to a paste. Add the spice mixture and process until well blended. Add the yogurt and lemon juice, and process to a smooth sauce, scraping down the sides to combine all the ingredients. Pour the marinade over the chicken. Turn to coat evenly, rubbing the marinade into the holes and slits. Cover tightly with plastic wrap, refrigerate for at least 4 hours, and up to 24 hours, turning occasionally. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Remove the chicken from the marinade. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 35 minutes. Serve with mango chutney and raita.

Nina's Sweet and Sour Bok-Choi

1 CSA bunch of Bok-Choi (or any other hardier greens, e.g. collards), washed and thinly sliced
1 1/2 Tbsp sesame oil (or coconut or olive oil)
1/4 inch fresh ginger root, grated
1 tsp Arizona honey
1 orange, juiced (approx. 3 Tbsp orange juice)
2 Tbsp Shoyu or Tamari soy sauce (or more to taste)
1 Tbsp Mirin or rice vinegar
Red pepper (or chipotle) flakes, to taste
1 clove garlic, finely minced
sea salt, to taste

Prepare the greens, warm up a large frying pan and heat up the oil. Add the ginger, garlic and chile flakes, fry for about 30 s (or until you can smell them, but don't let it brown!), then add the greens (with any water still sticking to them from washing), soy sauce, Mirin, orange juice and honey. Sauté at medium-high heat until the liquids almost disappear and the greens wilt. Or to preserve the liquids as a sauce to pour over rice etc., cover and cook for about 5-10 min on medium heat, depending on the tenderness of your greens.

Arugula (*Eruca Sativa*), also known as rocket (British English) or rucola (Italy, its unofficial origin; rukola in Slovenia), is a greens species from a Brassica family native to the Mediterranean region. It is used as a leaf vegetable, which looks like a longer leaved and open lettuce. It is rich in vitamin C and potassium. It has been grown in the Mediterranean area since Roman times, and was (is) considered an aphrodisiac. Before the 1990s it was usually collected in the wild and was not cultivated on a large scale or researched scientifically. In addition to the leaves, the flowers (often used in salads as an edible garnish), young seed pods and mature seeds are all edible.

Arugula has a rich, peppery taste, and has an exceptionally strong flavor for a leafy green. It is generally used in salads but also cooked as a vegetable with pasta sauces or meats in northern Italy and in coastal Slovenia, where it is added to the cheese burek (phylo dough-type of dish, filled with cottage cheese). In Italy and Slovenia, arugula is often used in pizzas, added just before the baking period ends or immediately afterwards, so that it won't wilt in the heat. Arugula is also commonly combined with the following ingredients: prosciutto, goat cheese, fig, Parmesan cheese, sun-dried tomato and endive.

Preparation: Separate out any yellow leaves, and wash well. Let dry, and then tear off bite-size pieces off the tough stems. Add to your favorite salad mixes for a peppery accent, or stick it into a sandwich, or serve on its own with some good olive oil, balsamic vinegar, sea salt and shavings of Parmigiano Reggiano and/or nuts. It can also serve really nicely as a bed for your grilled or roasted steaks, chicken or tofu. It will slightly wilt with heat, and the juices from the meats/tofu will mix nicely with its taste. You can also prepare arugula as any other winter braising green; try substituting it in your favorite creamed spinach recipe! Boil or steam it whole (remove just the largest stems) until it wilts, then chop finely. In a separate pot, melt some butter, add the arugula and a few tablespoons of cream, and bring to a light simmer. Can't be beat as an addition to your pasta or meat dishes! Or try making an arugula pesto: dry well, then blend (or pound in a mortar) with toasted pine nuts or other nuts, a clove of garlic, salt and olive oil. Mix with your pasta or serve over roasted or boiled potatoes and/or other roots. Or try spreading some in your next sandwich!