

# AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Summer 2009 / Week 10 of 13

Editor: Nina Altshul Layout: Peter Altshul

**Planned harvest:** Cucumbers, Melons (assorted), Red LaSoda Potatoes, Wheat Berries, Truckers Delight Sweet Corn, Eggplants, Green Beans, Tomatillos.

**News from the Farm – the Duncan Season:** As the fields on 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue are being disked in, we are starting to get produce from Frank’s farm in Duncan, Arizona. It is leasing these 8 acres in Duncan, i.e. on higher and cooler elevation, that allows Frank and Crooked Sky Farms to keep their CSAs going through the summer, as well as offer us a greater variety of produce. We are first going to start receiving cucumbers and green beans. More melons and watermelons, including the large tasty Crimson Red will be coming along, as well as corn, and in about 10 days we should start getting chiles, and bell peppers in about 16 days. By then the farm truck will be making three trips a week to the farm in Duncan. In the meanwhile, corn, melons, summer squash and greens are getting replanted at the central farm. Also, if all goes well we’ll start getting Asian pears towards the end of August and through September.

**Truckers Delight** is a classic, old-fashioned heirloom variety of sweet corn. Unlike the majority of corn available nowadays in stores and even farmers markets, this variety doesn’t have the artificially added sh-2 (supersweet) gene which causes the kernels to develop an extremely high sugar content. Don’t worry, Truckers Delight is still sweet, but it also tastes like corn. We like it raw, right off the cob, as a great snack. Of course it responds well to all other techniques of preparation, but don’t be surprised if Peter tells you: Forget butter, salt or any other spices. Just eat and enjoy!

**Eggplants: Glorious Globes or Insane Apples?** Eggplants are members of the *Solanaceae* (nightshade) family and are related to tomatoes, tomatillos, peppers and potatoes, as well as some poisonous plants, including tobacco, belladonna, and jimsonweed. Of the edible nightshades, eggplant is the only one native to the Old World. Scientists believe it originated in either India or Burma, and was carried east to China and west to Arabia by nomadic peoples. The Moors introduced it to Spain and from there to the rest of Europe in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Its name, eggplant, comes from the originally white fruit in the shape and size of chicken eggs, even though those early fruit were also yellow, brown and gray as well as purple. They were also very bitter, and were thought to be poisonous; in fact they were called *mala insane* or “mad apple” in Latin, which leads us to believe that the early fruits probably had a mild psychoactive effect (due to some alkaloids). (The modern Italian word for eggplant, *melanzana*, is a corruption of that phrase.) Through selective breeding, the bitterness is now disappearing, however, Southeastern Asian cuisine still prefers to use bitter fruits.

Eggplants have a moderate amount of vitamins and minerals, but are extremely good for binding cholesterol and thus contributing to healthier blood and vessels. The bitters in eggplants stimulate the digestion as well as liver and gall bladder and facilitate the digestion of fats. They are also hailed for their anti-cancer properties due to the antioxidant content, and are still used for their detoxification effects in Eastern medicine.

Eggplant is widely used in the culinary traditions of the Mediterranean and Asia, which offer several preparation tips and techniques. Unlike other plants, eggplants are mostly enjoyed cooked. They go well with olive oil, tomatoes and peppers as well as cheese, garlic and olives. Even though nowadays most of the eggplants we get are not bitter anymore, some cooks still recommend peeling them, as well as salting and letting them rest for about half an hour so that excess water can be removed.

*Melon of the Week: The Athena Cantaloupe, also known as Musk Melon, is a sturdy variety with well-netted skin and thick, firm, juicy salmon-colored flesh with outstanding flavor and aroma. It averages 5-6 lbs. and lasts for a long time after harvest. A hybrid originally introduced in 1995, it has become the number one cantaloupe variety in the U.S.*

# RECIPES ETC.

## Nina's Mom's Green Bean Soup

Trim a pound of green beans, and cut them into smaller pieces, about an inch long. Finely chop 3 cloves of garlic and set aside. Take 6 small red LaSoda potatoes, and cube into small pieces. Start by heating up 2 Tbsp of butter in a pan, add the beans and potatoes and sauté briefly for a few minutes. Add the garlic and let it sauté until you can smell the garlic. Sprinkle with 1 Tbsp of flour, add salt and pepper, and then pour water or stock over to cover. Bring to a boil, and then simmer for about 15-20 minutes. Throw in a few whole bunches of flat-leaf parsley in the meanwhile. Towards the end, correct the seasoning, retrieve the parsley, and serve sprinkled with chopped fresh parsley and a grinding of pepper. Offer some apple cider vinegar to add to individual palates and tastes.

## Julia Child's Ratatouille (Eggplant Casserole With Tomatoes, Onions, Peppers and Zucchini)

(adapted from *Mastering The Art of French Cooking, Vol. 1*)

Ratatouille perfumes the kitchen with the essence of Provence and is certainly one of the great Mediterranean dishes. As it is strongly flavored it is best when it accompanies plain roast or broiled beef or lamb, pot-au-feu (boiled beef), or plain roast, broiled or sautéed chicken. Equally good hot or cold, it also makes a fine accompaniment to cold meats, or may be served as a cold hors d'oeuvre. A really good ratatouille is not one of the quicker dishes to make, as each element is cooked separately before it is arranged in the casserole. Julia herself said that that way she can still see and taste each individual vegetable. Ratatouille can be cooked completely the day before it is to be served, and it seems to gain in flavor when reheated.

½ pound eggplant  
½ pound zucchini  
1 tsp salt  
4 Tbsp olive oil, more if needed  
½ pound (about 1 ½ cups) thinly sliced yellow onions  
2 (about 1 cup) sliced green bell peppers  
2 to 3 Tbsp olive oil, if necessary  
2 cloves mashed garlic  
Salt and pepper to taste  
1 pound firm, ripe, red tomatoes, peeled, seeded and juiced (makes 1 ½ cups pulp)  
Salt and pepper  
3 tablespoons minced parsley  
Salt and pepper

Peel the eggplant and cut into lengthwise slices 3/8 inch thick, about 3 inches long and 1 inch wide. Scrub the zucchini, slice off the two ends and cut the zucchini into slices about the same size as the eggplant slices. Place the vegetables in two separate bowls and toss with the salt. Let stand for 30 minutes. Drain. Dry each slice in a towel. Put the dried eggplants with some olive oil on the baking tray into a preheated oven at 350° F for about 30 minutes. In the meanwhile, one layer at a time,

sauté the zucchini in hot olive oil in the skillet for about a minute on each side to brown very lightly. Remove to a side dish. In the same skillet, cook the onions and peppers slowly in olive oil for about 10 minutes, or until tender but not browned. Stir in the garlic and season to taste. Then take your casserole dish, and begin the layering. Start with some tomato pulp, then eggplants, zucchinis, and onion-pepper mixture, and top with more tomato pulp. In between the layers, you can sprinkle some of the parsley. Put in the rest of the eggplant, zucchini, onions and peppers, and finish with the remaining tomatoes and parsley. Cover the casserole and cook at 350° F for about 30 minutes. During the baking, you might want to uncover, tip casserole and baste with the rendered juices. Correct seasoning, if necessary. Then uncover, and bake uncovered for about 15 minutes more, basting several times, until juices have evaporated leaving a spoonful or two of flavored olive oil. Set aside uncovered. Reheat slowly at serving time or serve cold.

## Eggplant with Yogurt and Dill

(adapted from Food Network.com)

Toss 1 pound chopped eggplant, 3 unpeeled Glendale Gold onions and 3 unpeeled garlic cloves with 1/4 cup olive oil, salt and pepper on a baking sheet. Roast at 400 degrees for 30 minutes. Add some walnuts; bake for 8 more minutes. Cool slightly, then squeeze the onions and garlic from their skins and chop; toss with the eggplant, nuts, 1/2 cup plain yogurt, fresh dill and salt and pepper.

## Cucumber Salsa Salad

(adapted from *The New York Times*)

1 cucumber, very finely diced  
Salt to taste  
1 small Glendale Gold onion, finely minced  
5 medium-size ripe tomatoes, finely chopped  
2 jalapeño or serrano peppers, seeded if desired and finely chopped  
¼ to ½ cup chopped cilantro (to taste), plus several sprigs for garnish  
1 tsp balsamic vinegar  
3 Tbsp fresh lime juice  
3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
Leaf lettuce or Boston lettuce for serving (optional)  
1 avocado, sliced, for garnish

Place the finely diced cucumber in a colander, and sprinkle with salt. Toss and allow to sit for 15 minutes. Rinse the cucumber thoroughly with cold water, and drain again on paper towels. Meanwhile, place the onion in a bowl and cover with cold water. Let sit for five minutes, then drain, rinse with cold water and drain on paper towels. Combine the tomatoes, chiles, cilantro, vinegar, lime juice and olive oil in a bowl. Add the cucumber and onion, and season to taste with salt. Taste and adjust seasoning. Serve the salad on lettuce leaves, garnished with slices of avocado and cilantro sprigs, or spoon over steamed rice.