

AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Summer 2009 / Week 2 of 13

Editor: Nina Altshul Layout: Peter Altshul

Planned harvest: Nopales, Sweet Potatoes, Glendale Gold Onions, Tomatoes (double share), Beets, Grapefruit, Summer Squash.

Farm Day at Crooked Sky Farms! Last Saturday Farmer Frank opened his farm in South Phoenix to his Community Supported Agriculture members and friends. Over 100 people came from Tucson, Phoenix and Flagstaff, including a group of 20 people from Ajo. After welcoming everybody to the farm, Frank explained how to tell when an ear of corn is ready to be harvested. It is amazing we even have corn, he continued, since each one of the hairs goes to a single kernel, and they all have to get pollinated for the corn to have kernels; if no pollination happens, you get an empty spot on your corn. Then he spoke about worms in corn. Organically-grown corn is naturally subject to infestation by corn borers, the small caterpillars of the corn borer moth. In order to control these, Frank uses wasps called *Trichogramma* wasps, a tiny wasp that eats the eggs of the corn borer moth. He first introduced them to his fields a few years ago, and was told that the wasps are 95% efficient in controlling the borers – it turns out that that doesn't mean that 95% of the corn won't get affected, but that more or less each cob will still get affected, but only about the top 5% of the cob! The borers do not affect the quality of the rest of the ear. The wasps are now naturally present in his fields, but also need some time to catch up with the borers, so before they do, perhaps you want to automatically chop off the top inch or two of your ears of corn before using them.

Frank then invited all his guests to walk the fields and do a bit of harvesting of corn, squash, tomatoes, cucumbers, basil and peppers on their own while his crew prepared a feast of seasonal vegetables, including roasted corn, roasted eggplants and potatoes, salad with basil-onion dressing, wheat berry pancakes and chocolate zucchini cake. It was exciting for the kids to be out there too: they got to ride on the tractor-powered "farm train," and some of them really got into harvesting fresh vegetables as well! "I am happy to open my farm to my CSA members. These kinds of events help people understand where their food comes from, and who grows it and how," said Farmer Frank.

What were some of the impressions among the Ajo crew?

"I loved it! The farm itself, the beautiful vegetables, the camaraderie of the people, the delicious food, and the feeling of connection to a larger community."
– Mari Kaestle

"I like it, I always like it. I particularly liked the peppers and artichoke thistles. Thank you, Farmer Frank, for another lovely day." – Jane Canon

"I had lots of fun. I got Frank to identify a bug I have in my garden, and I learned it wasn't something I need to worry about." – Christine Johnson

"I liked being with my friends, and picking the corn; the train ride was a bit slow but I really liked passing the wheat field because it looked so pretty." – Jasmine Johnson (age 7)

"It was wonderful, and what I liked the most was the ability that my children had to go out and pick the vegetables. They just loved that. Devin loved the corn, and Gracie loved the tomatoes and squash." – Fran Driver

"The most exciting thing for me was wheat berry pancakes because everything else I have already done but I have never made those, so that was really neat. I thought the farm was great! In my own garden I don't have any of those items that he has except squash and zucchini, but he has such a beautiful variety, and it was all really good quality. The tomatoes are really juicy, and the corn is unbelievably sweet." – Marilee Williams

"It was wonderful to see how the kids deal with the food. And it was great to find out that Farmer Frank feeds folks from Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff and Ajo. That is huge." – Jewel Clearwater



RECIPES ETC.

CSA Picnic Wheat Berry Pancakes

(submitted by Jennifer of Crooked Sky Farms)

Clean wheat berries in a pot of water, swish around and let the stuff surface, then remove. For pancakes, use 2/3 cups wheat berries, 1 cup milk, and blend together. Add 2 tsp baking powder, 2 Tbsp brown sugar, 2 eggs and a dash of salt, and mix it all together (her kitchen exploded when she was making the batter, since she was making such a large quantity that when she added the baking powder it just started bubbling all over the place). Spoon batter onto a hot greased griddle. Flip pancakes once during cooking (pancakes are ready to flip when bubbles on top stay open). Cook pancakes for several minutes, until done. Serve with fresh fruit or syrup!

Nina's CSA Picnic Chocolate Zucchini Cake

1 cup flour ground from CSA wheat berries
1 cup pastry flour
½ cup cocoa powder
2 tsp baking powder
2 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt
2 cups sugar or sweetener of your choice
8 Tbsp unsalted butter, at room temperature
½ cup olive oil
4 Ajo eggs (or 3 large eggs), at room temperature
1 tsp instant coffee granulates
1 tsp vanilla extract
1/3 cup sour cream or yogurt
3 cups grated CSA zucchinis (about 4 medium sized zucchinis)

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter and lightly flour a 9x13 inch pan. Mix the flours, baking soda, baking powder and salt all together in a medium bowl. In another bowl beat together the sugar, butter, and oil until well combined. Add coffee and vanilla, and add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Gradually stir in the flour mixture, blending until smooth. Stir in the sour cream, then the zucchini. Spread evenly into the pan, and bake until the cake springs back when pressed in the center, about 45 minutes. Cool and enjoy!

Calabacitas con Nopalitos

(adapted from Flagstaff CSA's blog)

A super simple way to use several of your CSA veggies this week, and versatile enough to accommodate any number of variations to suit your taste and/or mood! Calabacitas is Spanish for "little squash" or really, little pieces of squash, and the same applies to the nopalitos (little pieces of nopales). While the nopales can get a little slimy while cooking (not unlike okra), the sliminess tends to wane the longer you cook them, and also, if you keep the mixture relatively dry (as in roasting or sautéing rather than in a stew).

2 medium-sized summer squash – any variety works, and a mix is great too

1/2 onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, crushed

1-2 roasted green chiles or 1 bell pepper, chopped

2 small or 1 large nopal paddle, chopped

1 cup corn kernels

1/2 tsp ground cumin

1/2 tsp dried oregano

salt & pepper

Garnish: 1/2 lemon or lime, 1/2 cup chopped cilantro, 1/2 cup shredded cheese or crumbled queso seco/ricotta salata (optional)

Optional ingredients: diced tomatoes, green onions chopped greens (spinach, quelites, etc.), red chile, splash of cream, splash of tequila

Start with bite-sized pieces of summer squash. If your squashes are big and full of big seeds, you can remove them first. For zucchini and yellow squash, half-moons or quartered slices work well, but you can cube the squash instead, though it may need slightly more cooking time. Heat a few tablespoons of butter or oil in a large skillet until very hot. First add onions, stirring to cook one minute or so. Add garlic, chile pepper, squash, nopalitos & corn. Sauté on medium-high heat for 5-10 minutes, until vegetables start to brown slightly. Add remaining ingredients, including optional ingredients, and cook several more minutes, until everything is cooked to your taste. Squeeze lime or lemon juice over veggies and garnish with cilantro & cheese.