

Winter 2008 / Week 5

Planned Harvest: Spinach, Kale, Cabbage, assorted Head Lettuce, I'toi Onions, Squash, Purple Turnips, Sunchokes (Jerusalem Artichokes)

Desert Senita Community Health Center Annual Health Fair: Jane Canon invited the Ajo CSA group to make a presentation at the Health Fair which will be held on Saturday, January 31 from 10 to 2 at the Health Center. This is a great opportunity for us to share information with the community and possibly round up a few new members as well. We should prepare some fliers and have a sign-up sheet ready, and also a small table and chairs for volunteers. Please share your thoughts on this, and please let me know if you are willing to help and/or spend some time and share your experience with CSA with the visitors.

Sunchokes (Jerusalem Artichokes or Topinambour): A member of the sunflower family, *Helianthus tuberosus*, sunchokes are one of the few native tubers of North America, and are neither artichokes nor Israeli but got named Jerusalem Artichokes after a French explorer sent some plants back to a friend in Italy to cultivate in the Mediterranean climate. Thinking they tasted like artichokes, the Italian named the tuber "girasole articcico," meaning "sunflower artichoke", and this name got corrupted in English. The plant itself looks like a miniature sunflower, as it is related to asters, with bright yellow flowers. They are so easy to grow throughout North America and Europe that many gardeners consider them invasive weeds, like Black-Eyed Susans. Sunchokes are harvested in the spring, before the plant blossoms, by digging up the white, bulbous root growths. The plant stores inulin (not insulin) as starch for extra energy during winter months in its tubers. What makes the sunchoke useful, for diabetics in particular, is that the inulin it contains breaks down into fructose instead of glucose during digestion. This makes the sunchoke a good substitute for other starchy foods such as potatoes. They'll keep, refrigerated in a bag, for at least a week to a month.

Its taste is a cross between a rutabaga, potato, sunflower seeds and water chestnut, and can be eaten raw or cooked. Many recipes that don't specifically call for sunchokes would benefit from their crisp texture and nutty flavor. When you would have considered using jicama, water chestnuts, or almonds, try substituting the tuber. Fresh, chop them into salads, dips, salsa, chutney, or light marinades. Cooked, mix them in with soups, grilled poultry or fish, or sauces, or for a special treat, they are delicious deep fried as chips.

Their knobby shapes can make peeling sunchokes a bit of a challenge, but a potato peeler will do the job. Sunchokes will discolor when exposed to air so drop the peeled ones into a bowl of water with lemon juice. (sources: Vegetable Love, by Barbara Kafka, 2005; <http://www.wisegeek.com>)

Roasted Sunchokes in Tomato-Olive Sauce (adopted from Vegetable Love, by Barbara Kafka, 2005)

2 pounds sunchokes, peeled and cut into 1-inch wedges
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 ½ pounds medium shallots, peeled and trimmed
¾ cup of chicken or veggie stock
1 ½ pounds tomatoes, cored and chopped into large pieces, about 3 cups (or use canned)
¼ pound drained medium green olives, pitted or not, depending on your preference
1 tablespoon kosher salt
freshly ground pepper to taste

Place a rack in the center of the oven, and preheat the oven to 500°F.

Place the sunchoke wedges in a 17 ½ x 12-inch roasting pan. Slick with the olive oil, then arrange them in a single layer in the pan. Roast for 5 minutes, flip them over and rotate the pan. Roast for another 5 minutes. Flip sunchokes over again, and add the shallots in a single layer. Roast for 5 minutes, flip over and rotate the pan, and roast for 5 more. Flip all vegetables over again, add the stock and tomatoes, roast for 10 more minutes. Stir in olives and roast for 20 minutes or until the vegetables are nicely browned. Season with salt and pepper, and serve. This dish goes particularly well with simply prepared chicken or fish.

RECIPES ETC.

Old-Time Beef Stew, as modified by Paul Cottrell

2 pounds beef chuck, cut into 1½ inch cubes
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
1 clove garlic
1 medium onion, sliced
1 or 2 bay leaves
½ -1 tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
½ teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon pepper
Dash ground cloves
1-2 stalks celery, chopped into ½ inch pieces
6 carrots, pared and quartered
4 potatoes, pared and quartered
1-2 medium turnips, pared and quartered

In a Dutch oven, thoroughly brown meat which has been coated in flour in ¼ cup olive oil, turning often. Add 2 cups hot water and next 9 ingredients. Cover; simmer for 1½ hours, stirring occasionally to keep from sticking. Add vegetables. Cover and cook 30 to 45 minutes, or till vegetables are tender. Remove bay leaves before serving. If desired, thicken liquid by stirring in a flour paste and cook for a few minutes more. Serves 6 to 8. Serve with homemade baking powder biscuits and a green salad.

Nina's Curried CSA Solstice Soup

Dice one onion, 3 Red LaSoda potatoes, 2 sweet potatoes, 2 turnips, and 3 small kohlrabies, cover with cold water (about an inch above the veggies) and bring to a boil. Add about 1 inch of ginger root, peeled and grated, a few cloves of garlic, a bay leaf, a stick of cinnamon, and simmer for about 15 minutes. Then add chopped kohlrabi greens and about 3 tbsp. of ground cumin, 1 tbsp. of turmeric, and 1 tsp. each of ground coriander and cardamom (or about 4 tbsp. of your favorite curry seasoning powder). Simmer for another 15 minutes till all vegetables are soft. Remove half of the soup and blend (be careful when blending hot liquids; you might want to wait till the soup cools down for this step). Put back in the pot, add salt and cayenne pepper to taste and slowly reheat.

Onion soup - Soupe à l'Oignon Gratinée (from *The Sharper Your Knife, The Less You Cry* by Kathleen Flinn, 2007)

2 medium (1 pound) yellow onions, sliced thin
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
2 tablespoons flour
½ cup (125 ml) dry white wine or dry vermouth
1 tablespoon cognac (I didn't have any so I omitted it)
2 quarts (1 l) beef stock, boiled
½ teaspoon dried thyme
1 bay leaf
¼ French baguette, sliced thin
6 ounces (180 g) Gruyère cheese, grated (I substituted Sharp Cheddar)
1 ounce (30 g) Parmesan cheese, grated (optional)

In a heavy saucepan over medium heat, slowly brown the onions in butter until caramelized. Be patient; this will take at least a half hour. Sprinkle the onions with flour and stir thoroughly. Add the wine and cognac, cook long enough to evaporate the alcohol. Then add the hot stock, thyme, and bay leaf. Simmer for one hour, uncovered.

Preheat oven to 350 °F. Meanwhile, toast the baguette slices. Just before serving, top one side of the bread slices with some of the Gruyère cheese and broil lightly until cheese melts slightly. Remove the bay leaf and ladle soup into four broiler-safe bowls, such as heavy crockware. Put the toasts into the soup, cheese side down. Top with a layer of Gruyère, and then a bit of Parmesan. Bake for 15 minutes and then put under a broiler for a couple minutes until the cheese bubbles and browns.

Wendee's Spinach With Feta

1 bag fresh spinach (greens)
1 tablespoon olive oil
3 green onions
2 cloves garlic minced
1 tbsp. dill weed
¼ tsp. pepper
½ cup crumbled feta

In a large skillet-medium heat- cook with just water clinging to leaves from washing (about 3 min.), drain and chop coarsely. In the same skillet heat oil over medium heat and cook onion, garlic and dill weed until softened (about 3 min). Add greens pepper and all but 1 tbsp. of feta. Stir until feta is softened. Sprinkle with remaining cheese.