

AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Spring 2009 / Week 12 of 13

Potato Issue #1

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Planned harvest: Summer Squash, Eggplants, Chioggia Beets, Red LaSoda Potatoes, Citrus, Arugula, Yellow Onions and Farmer's Choice.

End of the Session and AJO CSA 1st Anniversary Potluck this Friday! The pick-up will be held from 6-7, and from 7 on let's celebrate! Peter and Terry will provide live music, bring a local seasonal dish to share and we'll toast one year of Community Supported Agriculture in Ajo!

Farm Picnic! An open day will be held at Crooked Sky Farms in South Phoenix on Saturday June 6. Farmer Frank invites CSA members and friends to visit the farm in Glendale and celebrate the summer bounty. Activities begin at 9 am, fresh corn will be roasted and Frank will lead tours of the fields. We will be carpooling from Ajo, let us know if you're interested.

Potatoes belong to *Solanaceae* family, commonly known as nightshades, which originated in South America – evidence suggests they were grown in the Andes at least 6000 years ago. What was for many centuries, after being spread by the Spaniards around the world, considered to be an inedible and useless plant, is today one of the most important commercially grown crops and food sources. The potato is a highly adaptable plant: over 400 varieties are grown at the moment, and the variety called Red LaSoda provided to us by Farmer Frank is well-suited to our southern Arizona climate thanks to its resistance to tipburn (browning of the edges or tips of leaves), wind, heat, and drought. It has a long shelf life and will keep for weeks on your counter top or even longer in your fridge. Since Farmer Frank doesn't use chemicals like fungicides and pesticides, you don't need to peel them; in fact much taste comes from the purplish skin. If you feel compelled to peel it anyway, don't throw the skins away—use them to add flavor to a soup stock.

Despite their “bad” reputation, potatoes have fewer calories and more nutrients than rice, pasta, or bread. A plain medium-sized potato has less than 100 calories, and boiling reduces the calories to a scant 80. The reason they are low in calories is that potatoes are 75 to 80 percent water. Also, their affect on the body is not acidic like the grains, but basic due to their high content of elements like potassium, calcium, magnesium and silicon and other microelements. Potatoes are also high in vitamin B (including niacin, thiamine, riboflavin, and pyridoxine), C, E and K, and also contain a wide spectrum of other vital elements. They have positive effects on digestion, and are even said to lower cholesterol level (when of course not smothered with rich creamy sauce). Potatoes also have a calming effect on the body, which is why it became such a perfect junk food vehicle. Another reason for that fact lies in the taste of potatoes – they taste good, due to a high quantity of *umami* elements. A loan word from Japanese, *umami* is nowadays generally accepted as the fifth common taste detected by humans (besides sweet, sour, bitter and salty). It is a pleasant savory taste imparted by glutamate, a type of amino acid, and ribonucleotides, including inosinate and guanylate, which occur naturally in many foods including meat, fish, vegetables and dairy products. The taste of *umami* itself is subtle and blends well with other tastes to expand and round out flavors, so even if you don't recognize *umami* as a separate taste, it plays an important role in making food taste delicious.

Due to its low starch content, the Red LaSoda has a creamy texture and is good for boiling, because it holds its shape when cooked. Its firm, waxy texture is also perfect for potato salads, gratins or sautéing. (By contrast, the buttery Yukon Golds we received from Farmer Frank earlier in the session are good bakers and fryers, due to their higher starch content, which gives them a more granular or mealy texture.)



RECIPES ETC.

Organic Potatoes with Red and Green (submitted by CSA member Mari Kaestle)

This is a good potato salad to accompany beef or fowl. It also can stand on its own with seasonal vegetables to make a light summer supper.

1 full bag of CSA small potatoes, washed, cut in quarters (app.2 lbs)
1/2 portion CSA red or green chard
2 CSA beets with stems and greens
1/4 head red cabbage
2-3 green onions sliced thinly
1-2 tablespoons olive or grapeseed oil
1 tablespoon cider vinegar/ or to taste
sea salt
freshly ground pepper
Plain yogurt

Wash greens and beets, chopping the beets and stems into small pieces. Ribbon chop chard and beet greens. Slice red cabbage thinly. Slice onions and tops thinly. Dry thoroughly. Salt potatoes generously and steam until tender, but not soft. Heat oil in deep skillet add onions and cook till lightly browned. Add greens and beets and cabbage slices, toss and cook only until wilted. Drain potatoes, return briefly to hot cooking vessel, then add to sauteed greens. Toss. Add salt, pepper and vinegar to taste. Serve with yogurt if desired.

Crispy and Creamy Potatoes (by Cheralyn Schmidt)

When frying potatoes, take care not to crowd pan as this will cool the oil – oil should be hot enough to briskly sizzle when cooking potatoes but not so hot that the oil smokes. If oil does not sizzle, remove potato and wait until oil is heated – cold oil makes a soggy product, hot oil creates a crunchy one.

12-15 small or fingerling potatoes (or cut larger potatoes into 3 inch pieces) (about 2 lbs)
1/2-3/4 cup olive, coconut, peanut or canola oil (or clarified butter if you want to get serious!)
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp pepper (fresh ground for finest flavor)

1/2 tsp finely chopped garlic or garlic powder
1 Tbsp fresh chopped parsley or dried (optional)

Wash potatoes leaving peel on. Puncture each potato a couple of times with a fork. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Roast potatoes until soft, about 15-25 minutes, or microwave on high for 5 or more minutes. Cool potatoes slightly. Place one potato at a time on a cutting board and press flat with the back of a spatula or bottom of a drinking glass until potato is about 1/2 inch thick. Potato skin will split and expose starchy insides. Preheat oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat for a few minutes. Oil is hot enough to fry potatoes when one edge of a potato sizzles when touching oil. Fry potatoes in batches (taking care not to crowd the pan) until crisp and brown on the outside. Transfer from oil to a paper towel covered plate to soak up excess oil then toss in remainder of ingredients. Serve hot.

Nina's Hunter Style Potatoes

Combine that umami taste in potatoes and mushrooms! Chop potatoes in wedges, add salt and oil, and start roasting at 375 F. Meanwhile, fry some yellow onion, add sliced champignon mushrooms (or a combination of oyster, portabella, shitake or any other mushrooms), salt and freshly ground pepper and cook until the water boils away. When the potatoes are almost done, add the mushroom mixture to the potatoes and let it all roast together for another 10-15 minutes. Sprinkle with chopped flat-leaf Italian parsley before serving.

Willy's Favorite Home Fries with Dill (submitted by CSA member Betsy Wirt)

Preboil the potatoes about 10 min to get them started, then cut them up into a cast iron pan with a little olive oil. You can also put in a little garlic or onions or preferably both before the potatoes. Add generous amounts of salt, pepper and dried dill weed. Start them on medium and gradually turn them down to medium low for about 20 min or until browned and crispy. If I'm cooking for the adults, I will throw in diced green tomatoes and arugula too.