



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

June 3-4, 2011

## Spring Farm Update

By Andrea Yoder & Richard de Wilde

Farming is a delicate dance between Mother Nature and the Farmers that manage the land. You just never know what kind of music Mother Nature may choose to dance to in a given year, so you just have to lay out plans and adjust your steps as you go. Last year we got an early, warm spring. We started planting in March, had salad mix and radishes by mid-April and said "Hello" and "Good Bye" to ramps and overwintered spinach pretty quickly as their season was shortened by warmer temperatures. This year has been a very different spring with cool temperatures, spring showers and cloudy days. In the third week of April we sent crews out to harvest ramps and overwintered spinach... only to have them return in just a few hours because it had started to snow and they could no longer find the vegetables under the white, snowy blanket!! We can count the number of warm, sunny, good growing days in the month of May on one hand.

During the winter we lay out planting plans for the season. We've had to make some adjustments to our plan, but have tried to follow the plan as closely as possible to get seeds and plants in the ground. We've taken advantage of the few dry days to prepare fields and do plantings. We've successfully planted 2 plantings of sweet corn and beans, 3 plantings of peas, two plantings of beets and carrots, burdock, edamame, chard, and a whole lot of parsnips! When corn and soybean plantings have been delayed all over the Midwest due to weather conditions, how did we manage to get two plantings of sweet corn and beans to germinate? Richard and Juan watched the weather forecast. When they saw 2 days of sun and 70°F coming they decided to go for it and do the plantings with the following strategy: They planted the seeds shallow, at ¾" instead of 1-2" deep. The sun warmed the top layer of cold soil and the seed germinated instead of just laying there and rotting. Farmer Richard says "The first 24 hours is the most critical time for germination." Also, our early bean variety is a carefully selected type that is a black seed. Black seeded beans germinate better in cold soil. Just goes to show that a skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced farmer can make sure we have food to eat, even in a challenging season!

## **THIS WEEK'S BOX**

**FRENCH BREAKFAST OR RED RADISH:** Root bulbs can be eaten braised, roasted, sautéed or raw! The tops can be added to salads, soups, pasta or braised with other greens. A very traditional tea sandwich is pumpernickel, butter and sliced, raw radish sprinkled with salt.

**SPINACH OR SAUTÉ MIX OR YUKINA SAVOY:** Sauté a couple handfuls with butter, garlic and nutmeg. Using your favorite risotto recipe, puree with a portion of the stock and use as the last addition of liquid. The color is gorgeous! Yukina is an Asian green with a slightly mustardy bite and the pepperiness of a turnip & can be substituted in recipes that call for spinach or chard.

**SALAD MIX:** In my opinion, when it comes to salads, less is more. This mix is the perfect base for any tossed salad. Add in some thinly sliced spring radish and dress with a simple balsamic vinaigrette.

**ASPARAGUS:** A great way to enjoy asparagus is in a raw salad. Many vitamins and minerals are lost in cooking. Chop in small discs or use a peeler to make ribbons and toss with lemon juice to help break down the starches in the stalks. Mix with greens, toasted hazelnuts and a hard salty cheese like pecorino or parmesan.

**RHUBARB:** Chop and simmer with water and sugar to make an infused syrup. Add any combination of cardamom pods, ginger, vanilla bean, lemon grass or basil for a more complex flavor. After cooking, strain off the solids and use the syrup for cocktails, mocktails or lemonade. Rhubarb gin and tonic is one of my favorites!

**POTATO ONIONS:** Can be used in just about any recipe calling for onion. They are more mild than onions harvested in the fall so they lend themselves well to egg dishes.

**GREEN GARLIC:** Mince the bulbs with parsley and lemon zest and mix with olive oil for a spring gremolata to serve with fish, chicken or pasta.

**BABY WHITE TURNIPS:** See Veggie Feature on the back of the newsletter

**PEA VINE:** These willy-nilly greens are the shoots of our sugar peas and remind me not to take veggies so serious! I can't help but smile when I see a bunch of these sweet, crisp tendrils. Mix them with other greens for a fresh salad or add to a stir fry or soup.

**HON TSAI TAI:** can be substituted in any recipe that calls for bok choy. Goes well with, but is not limited to, dishes that include soy sauce, ginger, garlic, sesame oil or chilis.

Our greenhouses were a little backed up in April because it was too wet to transplant in the field. We are back on schedule now and just this week we finished planting our first tomatoes, melons, watermelons, tomatillos and the first shipment of sweet potato slips. Last week we planted cucumbers and zucchini and quickly followed behind to cover them with a row cover to protect them from frost. Frost??—But it's the end of May?! That's right, temps dipped down into the mid 30's. Thank goodness it didn't freeze at night, but it was awfully close!!

Now, remember I said we can count the number of good growing days in May on one hand? So what impact does this have on the crops? Well, with unseasonably cool temps and cloudy days, plants grow—but do so painfully slowly. Asparagus doesn't emerge if it's too cold and can freeze off if the nighttime temperatures get too low. The rhubarb has been taking it's own sweet time sizing up as well. Last year we were almost done with asparagus and rhubarb by this time in the season. This year, we're still waiting for these crops to peak! For these two crops, we

look to other producers in our area to help us meet our needs for supplying your boxes while our young asparagus and rhubarb fields get more established. Unfortunately, all growers in this region are in the same boat. They don't have the products this year either!

We don't stop eating just because we are having a cool, late spring, so what do we do? We implement the best farming practices we can and wait patiently...ok, impatiently. We have taken advantage of planting on raised beds that dry out more quickly, allowing us to get plantings completed and do mechanical weed control even after it has rained. We have used many row covers this year to trap heat, thereby accelerating growth. Covers also help control the dreaded flea beetle, the destroyer of leaves on some plants. In fact, we had to order more row covers because we had more under cover this year than we have in the past. Farmer Richard has pulled a lot of tricks out of his hat this spring, but there comes a point where you can only do so much and then you just have to wait for the plants to do their thing.

We've been doing a lot of weed control

this spring, in our spare time. Why is it that the weeds always seem to grow regardless of the temperature? We've done some hand weeding, and we've been able to effectively manage some fields with mechanical cultivation.

Our new cold frame style greenhouse is in the final stages of construction and we were able to move plants into it just at the time when we needed it. It has been a saving grace this spring to slow down the growth of the plants while they waited to get to the field.

Our animals are out on pasture and doing well. We have 17 Black Angus Cattle, 27 active little pigs, and then there's the year-long residents—the goats and the chickens. Brandon, David and Angel have spent a lot of time fencing this spring to establish their rotational grazing areas.

Richard has been back on the bulldozer smoothing out roads and improving water drainage off of and around fields. Our frost seeded grasses and wild flowers are coming up and doing well in their first year of growth. This is all part of our landscape improvement project to provide more sanctuary for beneficial insects, bats and birds in the areas surrounding our fields. We planted currants, gooseberries, blackberries, cherry and plum trees and still have a few more things to put out. New bat houses and several more bird houses are up and in use.

Despite the fact that we've been doing a slow waltz with spring so far, we're all warmed up and ready to get down and boogie this season! We've accomplished many things and crops are looking good for the future. Every season is different, but that keeps farming (and eating) interesting!

### Vegetable Papillote (In Parchment) Serves 2

8 baby white turnips with green tops attached  
8 spring radishes with green tops attached  
2 green onions, cut in half lengthwise  
2 tablespoons fresh mint leaves  
1 fresh lemon  
2 Tablespoons olive oil  
salt and pepper to taste  
Two 12"x12" sheets of parchment paper

-Set the squares of parchment paper in front of you and fold into triangles. Now open them back up and place your vegetables on one of the triangles. On each piece of parchment place:

4 Baby White Turnips with greens, 4 Spring radish with greens, 1 green onion and 1 tablespoon of fresh mint. Squeeze a little lemon juice on the vegetable stack and drizzle with 1 tablespoon olive oil, salt and pepper to taste.

-Fold the parchment back over the veggies, again forming a triangle. Starting at one side, fold the edges together (if you have ever made a calzone then you know what I mean by folding the edges together). Just turn the edge up and over the top part, press to make it stay and proceed around the edge of the paper until you have an enclosed pocket.

-Place both parchment filled pockets on a cookie sheet. Place in a 350°F oven and bake for 10 minutes. Carefully cut a slit in the parchment when serving so the diner can easily open the pouch. Serve on a plate and let your guests or family open their papillote [pah-peh-YOHT].

### Vegetable Feature: Baby White Turnips

James Peterson, cookbook author, stated in one of his cookbooks that he grew up hating turnips. He admitted that turnips got a bad rap with the way they were cooked and the fact that they were bitter to his taste as a child. The Baby White Turnips we grow in the spring are not bitter at all! Thank goodness we have this variety to rid us, and James Peterson, of those bad turnip memories.

There are two types of turnips, each grown seasonally for a specific purpose. Fall turnip varieties grow slowly, developing over the summer into a turnip which is denser and slightly stronger in taste than the Spring turnips; thereby allowing growers to store them for later use. Spring turnip varieties grow quickly in early spring and are tender, crisp and sweet allowing them to be enjoyed at harvest time in salads, sautés, and raw.

Unlike their fall relatives, Baby White Turnips don't require peeling or braising to make them delicious. Don't get me wrong, I happen to love purple top turnips in the fall for pot roasts, boiled dinner or mashed with potatoes. So when I tried the Spring Baby White Turnips I was elated to discover I could eat them raw (greens included) or quickly sautéed or steamed.

In recent years, salad turnips such as the Baby White Turnips we grow, have been showing up at Farmers Markets, grown as a spring or even an autumn crop. These turnips are small, sweet and juicy, sometimes even fruity. They are more mild than traditional turnips, even more mild than radishes. They are best eaten raw (peeled or not- your choice) or very quickly cooked as in a stir-fry. The turnip greens are a tasty bonus. Baby White Turnips are a beautiful white color, but should you receive some that have blemishes, peel that area thinly and continue to enjoy. Turnips with greens will keep for several days in the refrigerator in plastic bags with holes poked through the plastic to allow the turnips to breathe.

Turnip greens are great in soups, especially if the soup has something slightly smoky in it; such as bacon or ham. Or, you can just cook them in a little bacon fat and sprinkle them with bacon cubes. If you would rather avoid the meat, stir-fry them in a good olive oil and chopped garlic. James Peterson loves them sliced and gently caramelized in port wine and butter.

The recipes I have included in this newsletter use the whole turnip with greens attached. Although the recipes may be a bit more time consuming, the taste should be well worth the extra effort.

While the boxes this spring are unlike last spring's, there will be more to fill your boxes as the season progresses. We are just two short weeks away from our first CSA farm event, Strawberry Day! Yes, we will have strawberries just in time for this event. Mark the date (June 19) on your calendar and plan to take a day to visit us here at the farm. We think you'll enjoy seeing the crops for yourself and we'd like to show you what we've been up to! Thank you for the opportunity to grow for you this season!

### Fresh Turnip Salad With Curry

Vinaigrette Serves 4

*Recipe by Chef Boni*

#### Vinaigrette (1½ cups)

In blender or bowl, measure the following ingredients:

1½ tablespoons curry powder

2 tablespoons honey

1 green onion or green garlic, small chop

1 garlic clove, minced

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon pepper

½ cup apple cider vinegar

-Blend all of the above together. With blender running (or if in a bowl, while whisking constantly), slowly add 1 cup sunflower oil

-Adjust seasoning to taste with salt and pepper

#### Salad preparation:

2 cups mixed salad greens

4 baby white turnip bulbs, thinly sliced.

Break green tops into bite size pieces and add to salad.

4 radish bulbs, thinly sliced. Break greens into bite sized pieces and add to salad (radish greens optional).

3 tablespoons sunflower seeds

¼ cup toasted almonds, slivered or rough chopped

-Mix gently, then portion onto four plates and drizzle with the curry vinaigrette.