



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

January 25-26, 2013

## Vegetable Shares are for Extended Season Shares Only

### Seeds, Seeds, Seeds: Looking to 2013

by: Richard de Wilde and Andrea Yoder

As we wash and pack the final boxes of the 2012 season, we are already making plans for next season. One of our annual January projects is to spread out all the seed catalogs on the kitchen table and carefully select the seeds we need to purchase for the upcoming season. There is a lot of planning that goes into this process, such as how many acres will we grow? How many plantings do we need to do? Which field will we plant that crop in (paying careful attention to how crops are being rotated through fields to prevent the spread of disease or insect problems)? What kind of weed pressure does a field have and how will a certain crop do in that soil type? Whew...it can be mind-boggling trying to balance all these variables! Armando is busy learning the intricate ropes of this delicate dance of preseason planting, and Richard and I hunkered down for two weekends to pull together our seed orders. There is always an urgency to secure our favorite varieties and careful evaluation of potentially promising new ones. We know the varieties we have planted previously with good results, so substitutions are not typically something we are interested in. Why do we care about where our seeds come from and which variety we get? Isn't a carrot a carrot and a melon a melon? The potential of a seed is only as great as the quality that it comes with. After that, it's up to the farmer to help that seed reach its full potential.

The seed reps from our favorite companies are an integral part of our community and a vital part to our search for high quality varieties. In July or August of every year, we prebook for about 10,000,000 spinach seeds to make sure we get our favorite variety called "Santorini." Our dear friend Vivian helps us coordinate this big purchase. We also look to our seed reps for their recommendations for new lettuce varieties we can use for our salad mix. There are several different producers that are continually developing improved varieties of lettuces. They are expensive seeds, but very reliable and in some cases mean the difference of being able to harvest a crop or having it succumb to mildew or other disease during vulnerable growing conditions. We have also learned, through many conversations with our seed companies, to know the characteristics of different seed companies. For instance, we know the Dutch company, Bejo, has a reputation for providing high quality hybrid seed varieties with good genetics, disease resistance, and they are meticulous with how they handle a lot of seed before they release it. They do extensive testing on their seeds to make sure there are no diseases

## This Week's Box: Extended Season

For more in-depth storage information, refer to last week's newsletter.

**BEAUTY HEART RADISHES:** This radish will store for a long time into the winter. If the outer skin starts to brown, it is likely only skin deep. Just peel off the outer layer of skin and use the inside flesh.

**CELERIAC:** Use to make a smooth, creamy celeriac bisque. Check out [epicurious.com](http://epicurious.com) for a recipe.

**PARSNIPS:** See vegetable feature

**CARROTS:** Make a delicious winter salad by combining roasted carrots (cooled to room temperature) with a citrus vinaigrette and shaved hard cheese.

**RED BEETS:** Cook, cool, peel and puree. The puree can be used to make a delicious beet vinaigrette (<http://www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com/NLTR/MAD/csamad100619.pdf>) or you can stir the beet puree into a brothy potato and cabbage soup for a quick spin on borscht.

**WHITE SUNCHOKES:** Cut into thin slices and pan-fry until golden brown along with onions, mushrooms, garlic and dried thyme & rosemary.

**GOLD TURNIPS:** Make a simple turnip mash by simmering turnips in milk until tender. Drain off the milk and reserve on the side. Mash the turnips or puree in a food processor. Season with salt & pepper and add some of the reserved milk to adjust the consistency to your liking. Excellent served with pork chops and pan-fried apples.

**YELLOW ONIONS:** Chopped raw onions add a nice zest and texture to a bowl of warm stewed beans.

**GARLIC:** Let garlic be your medicine this winter to ward off colds! We add chopped garlic to nearly every dish we prepare for our daily dose.

**FESTIVAL SQUASH:** Remove the rind and cut into chunks. Toss with oil, dried rosemary, salt and pepper and roast in the oven until golden brown. Serve with toast and over-easy eggs for a warm breakfast.

**CALYPSO (BLACK & WHITE), TIGER'S EYE (GOLDEN & MAROON) OR BLACK BEANS:** With the end of the season comes the end of our beans! All three varieties are excellent in soups or stewed on their own along with onions, garlic and seasonings of your choosing. The Calypso beans are a good choice for classic baked beans. The Tiger's Eye beans are also good as refried beans or in casseroles. Both of these varieties are also beautiful used in a salad where you can see their distinctive patterning. Don't forget, fresh dried beans will cook faster than stored dried beans, so monitor cooking time accordingly.

**BLACK RADISHES:** This is a more pungent radish. Slice thinly and layer it onto sandwiches or small dice it, mix with sour cream and serve it as a condiment with roast beef or steak. If you don't care for the pungency, soak radish slices in salted water for about 30 minutes and then rinse them prior to using in salads or other raw preparations. They are also milder when used in soups and stews.

**RED AND GREEN SAVOY CABBAGE:** This is one of our favorite cabbage varieties for eating and storing! Slice thinly and use in the place of lettuce on sandwiches and tacos.

on the seed coat. If they find anything, they hot-water treat it to kill the disease until it is clean. Through this entire process, they are also constantly testing the seed to check the germination potential and seed vigor....basically they are looking to see if there is still life in the seed and if so, how strong is it.

It is easy to be wooed by the glossy photos of beautiful, vibrant vegetables that are described with adjectives such as juicy, crunchy, intense, crisp and "melt in your mouth." We have learned to read between the lines of some of the jargon to know what they are really describing. For instance the term "mild flavor" probably means "bland." "Thin skin" often means likely to crack, as in watermelons and tomatoes. "Red-Orange" often means orange as in "not the deep, bright red color of a strawberry we are looking for."

Sometimes we run into issues with seed availability and occasionally it pays to keep something on backorder. Earlier this month we got a delivery from one of our seed companies--but I hadn't even placed my order yet! This was an exciting delivery because the seed was the much beloved, tasty French Orange Melon. The company that produces this melon has been threatening to drop this variety for the past several years, which essentially creates a sense of panic around here.

### Return Boxes/Coolers to Your Site Today!

This is our final CSA delivery this season so we will be having our truck return to all of our sites to collect empty boxes and coolers.

We do not want to burden our site hosts or your homes with these boxes until our 2013 season begins.

Keep your site clean and return your boxes and coolers in an organized fashion. Our delivery crew and your site hosts will greatly appreciate it!

...which is why I had stashed a couple years' worth of seeds. But if I can't replenish my stash, eventually the variety will go extinct on our farm! We are assured that enough other people sensed the same panic and they decided to keep it in their line-up—whew, that was close!

As we make plans and order seeds we once again are looking at this past fall's survey to try to better meet the likes and dislikes of our members. There are clear favorites like the top 12 most liked vegetables which included the following: Tomatoes, Spinach, Garlic, Greens, Carrots, Squash, Broccoli, Salad Mix, Potatoes, Onions, Peppers, and Sweet Corn.

There were also some crops that made it onto the "dislikes" list. For this reason as well as others, we plan to take a break from some of the specialty crops we grew the past several years including cardoon and lemongrass. We will always challenge ourselves to grow different and interesting vegetables, so this year we're going to expand our plantings of ginger and jicama beyond "trial" size and see if we can pull them off in larger scale. If you come across an interesting vegetable, let us know. We'll be looking for new things to trial and include in our rotation for upcoming years.

As for some of the items on the "likes" list, we have carefully selected our seed varieties and I hope you like our choices. Tomatoes, our number one most liked vegetable, will include a few new varieties including an heirloom black cherry tomato, two red slicing tomatoes with strong names such as "Mountain Merit" and "Iron Lady." With names like these, they must be good! We're going to continue to grow a few of our favorites including the terribly delicious "Sungold" tomato and our favorite golden slicing tomato named "BHN-876" (Not an exciting name for the best tasting gold tomato on the market). We are going to continue with our favorite heirloom black tomato called "Black Velvet" and we are bringing a new heirloom into the mix this year for a change. Our new kid on the block this season will be the "Green Zebra" tomato. I mentioned that the spinach is on order, and better yet there is some overwintering in the field right now with a fence around it to protect it from the deer. I can hardly wait to sink my teeth into those thick, sweet overwintered spinach leaves! A large and very nice garlic crop was planted in October and was mulched before the first hard frost set in. Well, at least we have the top 3 vegetables on the list taken care of!

We have an exciting new potato variety to try this season called "Spartan Splash." We are crossing our fingers that we'll actually receive our amazing corn varieties that are on order and proved to produce some of the most delicious corn we've ever had. Thanks to our friend Phil who recommended varieties such as Awesome, Stellar, and Fantastic welcome their sister variety, Primus. Phil's expertise has helped move us from a good crop of sweet corn to an Awesome crop that tastes Fantastic and has Stellar quality. We're going to do our best to pull it off again this season!

There are so many more varieties coming your way. We're going to take a little break from packing CSA boxes until May, but don't worry—we have plenty to keep us busy! We still need to inventory all the seeds, sterilize and germ test them, set up the greenhouses and finish our application for our visas so our crew can come back to help us get this all going! We thank you so much for supporting us this past season. We consider it a privilege to grow food for you and your family and look forward to doing this again for many years to come. See you in the spring!

**\*\*Now Hiring Delivery Helpers for our 2013 Twin Cities CSA Route on Thursdays:** If you know someone in the Twin Cities who would be interested, see your 'What's In The Box' email for details and let us know!

## Vegetable Feature: Parsnips

Parsnips fill an important place in our seasonal Wisconsin diets because of their ability to store really well through the winter, both in our refrigerators as well as in the field. Parsnips are one of our largest crops, second only to beets. Some of those parsnips we harvest in the fall and some we leave to harvest in the spring. They are a challenging crop to grow because their seeds take about 2 weeks to germinate, you have to plant them early in the spring when the soil is still cold, and you have to manage them for a long growing season. This year we lost several acres of parsnips to early spring rains that washed out a young planting, which makes the parsnips we were able to harvest even more special this year.

Parsnips are a versatile vegetable that can be prepared in a variety of ways. They are delicious roasted, glazed, sautéed, mashed and in soups and stews. They pair very well with other root vegetables, wine, shallots, apples, walnuts and a variety of spices. If you are in the group of people that "Loves" parsnips, then you probably don't have any problem using the amounts in the storage shares in January. If you are still learning to like parsnips, you may feel like you are up against a 'brick wall' of parsnips and you may not know how to put them to good use. Start mixing a small amount of parsnips into root mashes or roasted root veggie mixes with other root vegetables. You can also add small amounts of parsnips to soups such as chicken and rice or vegetable beef. I like to add a few parsnips to pot roast to give the broth a bit of sweetness. Parsnips are also good in baked goods such as cake, cookies, muffins and quick breads. If you find a recipe that calls for shredded apple, carrot or zucchini, the recipe will most likely work with parsnips as a substitute.

Store parsnips in the coldest part of your refrigerator in a plastic bag. They will store for several weeks under these conditions, so don't feel like you need to eat them all in the first week! When you are ready to use them, scrub the outer skin with a vegetable brush and trim off the top and bottom. If you are making a pureed parsnip soup and want it to be snow white, I'd recommend peeling the parsnips. If you aren't looking for an art display presentation, I would recommend skipping the peeling part of the process.

## Chardonnay-Braised Chicken Thighs with Parsnips

Recipe borrowed from *Food and Wine Magazine*, October 2012

Serves 4

2 Tbsp unsalted butter  
2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil  
8 medium chicken thighs (about 2 ¾ pounds)  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
¼ cup all-purpose flour  
4 small shallots, peeled and quartered  
1 pound parsnips, peeled and cut into 3-by-½-inch batons  
1 rosemary sprig (about 6 inches)  
1 cup Chardonnay or other dry white wine  
1 ½ cups chicken broth  
Chopped flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. In a large, deep, ovenproof skillet, melt the butter in the oil. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and dust with the flour, tapping off the excess. Add the chicken to the skillet, skin side down, and cook over high heat, turning once, until browned, 6 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
2. Add the shallots, parsnips and rosemary to the skillet and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the wine and boil until reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Add the broth and bring to a boil. Nestle the chicken skin side up in the skillet tucking it between the parsnips. Transfer the skillet to the middle rack of the oven and braise the chicken uncovered for about 25 minutes, until cooked through.
3. Turn the broiler on. Broil the chicken for 3 minutes, until the skin is crisp. Re turn the skillet to high heat on the stove top and boil until the sauce is thickened, 3 minutes. Discard the rosemary sprig. Transfer the chicken and vegetables to bowls, garnish with parsley; serve.