



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

May 17-18, 2013

How do the Sticks Fit In?

by: Richard de Wilde

You may be wondering why we offer bunches of decorative willow, dogwood, and pussy willow every spring with the first two CSA deliveries. Don't we specialize in vegetables? We are definitely a food production farm and decorative plants and flowers require different equipment and management systems than food crops. Even so, growing willow has become a very important part of the health and vitality of our vegetable production system.

Organic systems require much more complicated production techniques than simply spraying chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Creating habitat on the farm for bats, birds and beneficial insects is an important part of managing pest insects and pollinating our vegetable crops. We have planted hedgerows of pussy willow, curly willow and dogwood through our vegetable fields as habitat for these beneficials. In fact, Alvaro & Juan Pablo just finished planting a brand new hedgerow of curly willow yesterday and they are planting elderberries today!

Every spring the pussy willow catkins are buzzing with bees and wasps. These bees are important pollinators for crops such as strawberries, watermelons, melons and squash. The pussy willow allows them an early spring source of nourishment. We like to see the wasps because they help to control pest insects by attacking the larval or immature stages of whiteflies, moths, leaf beetles, cabbageworms, slugs, and other pest insects.

Our curly willow is host to a myriad of creatures that work together to help control garden pests. The beneficial wasps like to nest in the curly willow, as do songbirds that also help with pest insect control. The willow produces a protein-rich sap from its branches. There is a black aphid that likes to feed on the sap. The black aphid isn't a pest in our fields and confines itself to the willow branches. This aphid consumes the protein available as sap, and exudes from its back sugary "honeydew." Beneficial wasps in turn love to feed on the honeydew on the backs of the aphids. These wasps help us to control our cabbageworm populations. Predatory wasps can be seen carrying cabbageworms out of the fields to feed to their young larvae. Small parasitic wasps also control the worms by injecting

RAMPS: We're nearing the end of the season, possibly the last week of harvest. Make your favorite ramp recipe before they're gone!

OVERWINTERED PARSNIPS: Make parsnip chips to take in your lunch. Slice thinly, toss with oil, salt and pepper and roast until golden and crispy.

OVERWINTERED SUNCHOKES: Consider trying the sunchoke soup recipe in this week's newsletter. It's super easy to make, has a smooth & silky texture and is very tasty!

CHIVES: Cheddar cheese & chive biscuits; Scrambled eggs with chives & feta; chives blended with oil to make a smooth, bright green sauce for grilled chicken or steak....just a few of our favorite uses for this spring allium.

SORREL: To identify this green, eat a small piece of one of the leaves and you'll find it will have a tangy lemon-like essence. Slice the leaves finely and add to chicken or tuna salad to add a bright tanginess.

BLACK RADISH: Slice thinly and marinate in a citrus vinaigrette. Toss the marinated radishes with spinach and a drizzle of oil for a quick salad.

SPINACH: Check out this week's vegetable feature for spinach ideas!

ASPARAGUS: The season is just starting so the portion is small, but it was well worth the wait. Lightly sauté in butter with ramp bulbs just until tender. Season to taste and enjoy—simple, but so good!

CHOICE

NETTLES: Don't forget these nettles may irritate your skin a little bit if handled with bare hands. Be sure to blanch them in boiling water before you eat or use them. Refer to last week's newsletter for recipe and use suggestions. They are a rich spring green that won't be available much longer.

CURLY WILLOW, PUSSY WILLOW, & DOGWOOD: Wondering why we deliver sticks with the vegetable boxes? Because they are part of the whole system of producing your food! Read this week's main article for more information.

their eggs into the cabbageworms. The cabbageworm then is host to the young wasp larvae that when hatched feed on the body of the cabbageworm.

Our red and cardinal dogwood hedgerows are a favorite nesting area of many birds. The spring flowers produce nectar for bees and later berries that are loved by many birds and mammals. We harvest the willow and dogwood in the winter, before the birds have built their nests or the aphids have come out. We always leave some branches behind for spring nests and pollen.

Over the past few years, we've had the opportunity to clean up the perimeters of some of our fields where trees and less desirable bushes and brush have taken over and have started to shade the field and rob the crops of valuable water and nutrients. These areas look much better now that we've removed a lot of this brush, but we've also tried to be very conscious that we are replacing nature where we've disturbed it so we can continue to provide habitat for the birds, insects and bats that we want as part of our system. In addition to prairie grasses and flowers, we've also planted cherry & plum trees, hazelnut & pine nut trees, elderberries,

gooseberries, currants and blackberries. These plantings will provide a place for critters to reside as well as a food source for them during different parts of the season.

Use the willow or dogwood in dried arrangements. You may add it for a short time to a vase of flowers with water, but it eventually will sprout and produce roots. Dried, the willow and dogwood will last for months to come.

Get your June Meat Order in Today!

Our June Meat delivery will take place on June 14/15! Be sure to get your order to us by June 5th to get your organic 100% grass-fed Angus beef. Our next meat delivery won't be until November, which makes now the perfect time to stock up for the summer months ahead! Sign up for our 3 or 5 delivery meat club to save on your deliveries for the year!

Visit www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com to find our order form and more information!

Vegetable Feature: Overwintered Spinach

Overwintered spinach is a way we can extend our season to have fresh greens early in the spring. We plant the spinach in the fall and in the spring it pushes out new growth. This is some of the best spinach of the entire year and is different than the other spinach that we plant in the spring and early fall. It's the same seed, but something happens within the plant over the winter to allow it to adapt to the winter environment. The result is sweet tasting spinach in the spring with thick, yet tender and flavorful leaves.

Spinach is a crop that grows best in moderate temperatures, thus it does well in the spring and fall. You'll notice we don't pack spinach in your boxes during the summer. We take a break from planting spinach during the heat of the summer because the soil is too hot to germinate the seeds.

Spinach pairs well with many other ingredients including bacon, butter, cheese, cream, eggs, chives, cumin, curry, ginger, horseradish, lemon, mint, mushrooms, nutmeg, nuts (especially almonds and walnuts), oranges, onions, olives, raisins, sour cream, tomatoes, flavored vinegars.

Spinach leaves are sturdy enough to dress with a thick, creamy dressing (such as the Buttermilk Ramp Dressing in this week's newsletter). Spinach leaves may also be dressed with a lighter vinaigrette as well or just a simple drizzle of a flavorful oil and a squeeze of lemon juice. Spinach salads can be garnished with a wide variety of ingredients including toasted or candied nuts, hard-boiled eggs, croutons, sunflower seeds, lemon zest, crumbled blue cheese or feta cheese, olives, dried fruit, crumbled bacon or chunks of fried tofu. If you are using cooked spinach, you can simply wilt it down in a sauté pan with a little bit of moisture. Be careful not to overcook it or you will lose the bright green color. Once it is wilted down, you can eat it as is or use it as an ingredient in other recipes. Some common uses for spinach include the Greek Spinach pie called spanakopita, Chicken Florentine, and Spinach Calzones.

Spring Spinach Chop Salad with Creamy Buttermilk Ramp Dressing

Recipe by Chef Andrea Yoder

Serves 4-6

Dressing:

1/3 cup mayonnaise
1/3 cup sour cream
1/3 cup buttermilk
3 Tbsp lemon juice or white wine vinegar
1/2 bunch ramps, white bulb and green leaves, cut into 1/2" pieces
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Salad:

8 oz spinach
2 oz sorrel, watercress, or other spring greens, torn into bite-sized pieces
2 hard-boiled eggs, medium dice
1 cup seasonal vegetables, cut into bite-sized pieces (selections may include asparagus, spring radishes, baby white turnips or any other spring morsels you can find!)
1/2 cup almonds, toasted and chopped
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Dressing:

1. Combine all ingredients in a blender or food processor.
2. Blend until the ramps are chopped up finely, but there is still a little texture in the dressing.
3. Adjust the seasoning to taste. Chill until ready to use.

Note: The dressing yields about 2 cups of finished product. If you have extras remaining after you make this salad, use it as a dip for other veggies, etc or drizzle on top of pasta or grain dishes. It also makes a flavorful sandwich spread.

Salad:

1. To assemble the salad, toss the spinach, spring greens and seasonal vegetables in a large mixing bowl.
2. Add several spoonfuls of ramp dressing to the greens. Using tongs, toss the greens with the dressing. Add more dressing if you wish to make it to your liking.
3. When the greens are well-coated, add the eggs and toss gently to incorporate. Portion the salad onto 4 dinner plates. Garnish with the toasted almonds.

Note: This recipe makes a tasty main entrée salad accompanied by grilled tofu or flank steak. It also pairs well with a bowl of soup or a sandwich. Adjust the ingredients according to your liking.

Sunchoke & Spinach Soup

Recipe adapted from *Tender* by Nigel Slater

Serves 4

1 bunch ramps, scallions,
or green garlic
2 Tbsp + 1 Tbsp butter
3/4 pounds sunchokes, peeled
2 bay leaves
3 cups water
8 oz spinach
1-2 Tbsp sour cream
Ground nutmeg

1. Finely slice the bulbs or white part of the ramps, scallions or green garlic. Save the green leaves from the ramps or the green tops from the scallions or green garlic for another use.
2. Melt 2 Tbsp butter in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Add the ramps/scallion or green garlic to the pan and allow to sweat over medium heat until softened.
3. Cut the sunchokes into 1/2-inch pieces and add them to the saucepan. Continue to cook the vegetable mixture for several minutes, then add the bay leaves and stock or water. Bring to a boil. Decrease the heat so the soup bubbles gently, partially covered. Simmer for 20-25 minutes or until sunchokes are tender.
4. Puree the soup in a blender until smooth. Pour the blended soup into a bowl, cover and set aside.
5. In the same pan you cooked the sunchokes, melt 1 Tbsp butter. Add the spinach and turn it from time to time until it softens. Season with salt and pepper. Once the spinach is wilted, transfer it to the blender, add the sour cream and a tiny pinch of ground nutmeg. Blend to combine into a coarsely blended mixture.
6. Serve the warm sunchoke soup with a spoonful of the spinach cream in each bowl. Mix the two components together lightly as you eat the soup.