



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

August 29-30, 2014

Vegetable Feature: Onions

by Sarah Janes Ugoretz

You may have noticed by this point—especially if you've been a Harmony Valley Farm CSA member—that we're really into onions. Our belief is that year-round, daily consumption of onions is not only important for our health but also for the flavor profile of the foods we prepare. These two convictions guide what Farmer Richard refers to as "our onion line-up." Over the course of the season, an onion in some shape or form (we include garlic, leeks and ramps in this group, too) is included in each CSA box and, if it's market season, you'll be sure to find an assortment of these on our stand. Health-wise, the benefits of consuming onions are undeniable. Research suggests that onions may prevent blood clotting, lower your heart rate and guard against cardiovascular disease. Nutritionally, the presence of vitamin C makes onions an excellent source of dietary fiber and folic acid. Meanwhile, they also provide you with healthy doses of calcium, iron and quercetin—an antioxidant compound that, in layman's terms, helps ward off disease. For the sake of comparison, onions contain approximately three times the amount of quercetin than kale, a widely regarded super food! It's important to note that the potential nutritional benefits are most present in strong onions, which have a greater concentration of sulfur compounds (these are the culprits that make you tear-up when slicing and dicing your onions). The good news is, however, that the nutritional benefits remain largely intact regardless of whether you're eating your onions raw or cooked—though some research does suggest that the potential benefits may be more effective when onions are consumed raw.

A great deal of time, energy and passion goes into growing these almighty onions. Farmer Richard recently reminisced on the evolution of Harmony Valley Farm's approach to onion production. Basically, onions are inherently difficult to grow. One of the major impediments is a tiny insect called the thrip, which is highly elusive even in the face of organic insecticides. Thrips leave the onions with miniscule holes, which create a pathway of entry for various types of bacteria, fungi and disease, not to mention that in a wet environment, onions may become water-logged which can lead to soft-rot. Faced with the double challenge of thrips and the discovery that many of his onions contained some soft-rot, Farmer Richard reached out to the UW-Extension which promptly advised him to begin growing his onions on raised beds (imagine mounded rows on which crops are grown). Essentially, this would cause water to run off, which would maintain a drier growing environment. Unfortunately, doing this would require not only the purchase of a large amount of equipment, but labor demands would also intensify as

This Weeks' Box

SWEET SPANISH ONIONS: Read this week's newsletter article to learn more about onions.

ITALIAN GARLIC: Roast a head or 2 of garlic depending on size, mash and add to mac and cheese for a grown up flare on a childhood favorite!

ZUCCHINI: Roast up some slices of zucchini with poblano peppers and sweet Spanish onions until tender. Place in taco shells and top with fresh salsa verde for a meatless taco!

CUCUMBERS: Make a Tzatziki ranch dressing with buttermilk, yogurt, garlic and herbs. Serve over a salad of roasted cauliflower and edamame.

BROCCOLI OR CAULIFLOWER: Roast broccoli with sliced garlic cloves, olive oil, salt and pepper. When tender with some browning on the tips, remove from oven and top with lemon zest, lemon juice and grated Parmesan. Make a marinated Mediterranean salad with cauliflower, onion, tomatoes, olives, artichoke hearts and roasted red pepper. Top with feta and a balsamic vinaigrette dressing.

WATERMELON: Start your morning with a bit of sunshine in a glass! Make a refreshing summer smoothie with watermelon, an orange and a splash of coconut milk.

JALAPEÑO PEPPERS: Try a cucumber, lime and jalapeño salad. Toss diced jalapeño, cucumber, a clove of garlic, the juice of one lime, salt and pepper with olive oil for a cool salad with a bit of heat.

ASSORTED TOMATOES: Slice tomatoes and serve on a crusty bread with provolone, avocado, sprouts and an Aioli dressing for a quick and easy summertime sandwich.

GRAPE TOMATOES: Make a roasted salsa. Roast in the oven with an onion, a couple of cloves of garlic, an ear of shucked corn, cilantro and salt, all drizzled with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Let cool and add more fresh cilantro to taste. Chill and serve with tortilla chips.

POBLANO PEPPERS: Poblanos are a dark green pepper with a pointed end and larger than a jalapeño pepper. Although these medium heat peppers are traditionally stuffed, they are mild enough that they can be simply drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt.

ORANGE UKRAINE PEPPERS: These peppers are similar to bell peppers but are slightly pointed at the bottom. They are a mild pepper and would substitute well anywhere a bell pepper is used.

GREEN BEANS: Add steamed green beans to a skillet of butter, cherry or grape tomatoes, garlic, basil, sugar, salt and pepper. Sauté lightly until flavors mix.

CARROTS: Roast carrots with a bit of butter and maple syrup for a vegetable side dish that tastes as good as candy!

PURPLE-GOLD POTATOES: These potatoes are purple skinned potatoes with gold flesh. They hold up well to roasting, boiling, pan frying and sautéing. Try them sprinkled with thyme, olive oil and Parmesan.

FRENCH ORANGE MELONS OR GREEN JAPANESE CANTALOUPE: The French Orange melon has a netted rind that is slightly ribbed. It is delicious cut into chunks and eaten fresh paired with feta and goat cheese. The Green Japanese Cantaloupe has a netted rind with a bit of a green hue. Its aromatic flesh is smooth, juicy and green and would look amazing in your next fruit bowl.

CHOICE: EGGPLANT: Try grilling eggplant with a honey-garlic marinade. The honey helps to caramelize the eggplant giving it a deep golden hue and slightly sweet flavor.



Onions drying in the greenhouse in preparation for cleaning.

mechanically cultivating weeds becomes less manageable with this specific approach. Nevertheless, after much hemming and hawing, 15 years ago Farmer Richard made the leap and converted the entire farm to a raised bed system. Paired with the use of reflective, silver mulch to deter the destructive thrips, Harmony Valley's onions couldn't be happier.

By the time they get to you, Harmony Valley's onions have had quite the journey. They are the first seeds to be planted in the greenhouse, which keeps them from freezing in the cold of early February. Once they reach a certain size, they are transplanted into the field. "Transplanting two acres of onions and shallots takes several days," Richard reflects. Then consider that all of the harvesting, topping and cleaning that takes place is done by hand, without the help of any mechanized equipment. Industrial, highly mechanized farms in California produce shallots that are never once touched by a human hand. They're cheap, but there is an element missing—what Farmer Richard calls the "hand-manicuring" component. We forego mechanization when it comes to our onions because using machinery can, and often does, cause damage, which means we wouldn't be able to provide you with the same high quality onions that we currently do.

Depending on the variety, onions are either slow or fast growing. The first onions to be harvested in the spring—Egyptian Walking onions and Potato onions—are actually planted along with garlic in the fall. Scallions—both green and, as of this year, red varieties—are the next to arrive, followed by cipollini and candy onions, such as the Sweet Spanish onions we've had lately. These onions are relatively fast growing, which means they tend to store for shorter periods of time. With the arrival of late summer, the farm crew will prepare to harvest what we call yellow and red "storage onions," which, by this point, have been in the ground for a few months. While they take quite a while to mature, these are the onions that will carry you through the cold winter months and into spring.

It's time now to return to that one aspect of onions that we all dislike—the fact that they can be a major pain to work with. Their strong smell is renowned, and in fact Egyptologists believe that onions were often entombed with the dead because it was thought that their strong scent would prompt the non-living to breathe again. That certainly says something about the olfactory power of the onion! And then there's the aftermath that comes with cutting into an onion. Slicing through an onion releases the sulfur compounds held within, which often results in teary eyes and runny noses. As Farmer Richard says plainly, "The crying is a little hard to love." Given that the onion has been around since 2500 B.C, it is not surprising that there are countless theories on how to minimize this pungency. Some of the older, more odd suggestions include holding an extinguished matchstick in your mouth or clenching a wooden spoon between your teeth while slicing. Less strange, but nonetheless ineffective methods involve immersing or slicing onions under running water, or wearing protective goggles. What has been shown to work well is simply refrigerating your onions over night or for a few hours prior to working with them. You might still find yourself tearing up, but the impact of the compounds will likely be subdued. On the other hand, cooking and caramelizing your onions highlights the natural sugars that have always been there but have been masked to varying degrees by the sulfur compounds. So, the next time you hold an onion in your hand, do as we do—look beyond the tears and appreciate the onion for the highly nutritious, masterful vegetable that it is!

Creamy Sweet Onion Soup

Recipe adapted from a recipe for Creamy Vidalia Onion Soup featured at www.allrecipes.com.

6 sweet onions (about 6 cups sliced onions)
3 Tbsp butter
1 Tbsp all-purpose flour
½ tsp salt, plus more to taste
2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
1 cup milk
½ cup heavy cream
3 egg yolks, beaten
1½ tsp paprika
Ground black pepper, to taste
½ tsp hot pepper sauce (optional)
2-4 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley

1. In a saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Add onions; saute until golden brown, about 10 minutes.
2. Stir in flour and salt and mix thoroughly. Gradually add chicken broth, stirring constantly. Cover and simmer over low heat for about 10 minutes.
3. When onions are very tender, stir in milk and cream. Heat through. Remove ½ cup soup and put it in a small bowl. Slowly mix the egg yolks into the soup in the small bowl. Once the egg yolks are incorporated, pour the milk and egg mixture slowly into the remainder of the soup in the pan. Heat through, but do not allow the soup to boil.
4. Stir in paprika, black pepper and hot pepper sauce (optional). Serve hot, and garnish with chopped parsley.

Produce Plus

Roma Tomatoes, 25 pounds - \$38
Sweet Onions, 10 pounds - \$24
Green Beans, 10 pounds - \$35
Edamame, 10 pounds - \$44
Jalapeño Peppers, 5 pounds - \$18

Order by 5pm on Wednesday, September 3rd for delivery on **September 5-6th.**

To order, please call 608-483-2143 x2 or email csa@harmonyvalleyfarm.com

Please drop your check in the mail the same day that you place your order.

Please be sure to include your name, telephone number and pick-up location with your order!

Green Lentils, Rice and Caramelized Onion

Recipe borrowed from Salma Hage's book *The Lebanese Kitchen*.

Serves 4

1 cup green lentils
4 Tbsp olive oil
5 small onions, sliced
½ cup instant (easy cook) rice, rinsed
2 tsp salt
½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp seven spices seasoning*
½ tsp black pepper

1. Put the lentils in a pan, pour in water to cover, and bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a skillet or frying pan, add the onions, and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 10-15 minutes until caramelized. Add the rice and salt to the pan of lentils, replace the lid and simmer for 10-15 minutes until the rice and lentils are tender and the liquid has been absorbed.
3. Stir in the cumin, seven spices seasoning, pepper and caramelized onions and serve warm.

*Seven Spices Seasoning Mix: You can buy this blend of spices pre-made, or you can make it yourself (see recipe below). It is good to use as a seasoning for sauces, meat, grilled vegetables and more.

Lebanese Seven Spices Seasoning

5 Tbsp ground allspice
3½ Tbsp ground black pepper
3½ Tbsp ground cinnamon
5 Tbsp ground cloves
4 Tbsp ground nutmeg
4 Tbsp ground fenugreek
4 Tbsp ground ginger.

Mix the spices together thoroughly and store in an airtight container in a dark place.

SAVE THE DATE!

HARVEST PARTY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014

Watch for more details coming soon.