



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com

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Culinary 101—Lesson #1: Keep it simple!

by Andrea Yoder

As I write this article, I pause to consider the wide expanse of experience our CSA members bring to the table. Some of our seasoned CSA veterans have been cooking “out of the box” for 15-20 years, while others in our membership may be in their first year of experiencing CSA... with the bunch of hon tsai tai from last week’s delivery pushed to the back of the refrigerator with a big question mark on it. “What am I supposed to do with this weird/unfamiliar food?” Despite my training as a professional chef and a high level of comfort in the kitchen, I too face my own culinary challenges every day as I stand in the kitchen, tired, hungry and waiting for food to magically appear in front of me. Whether your challenge is limited time and energy or you just don’t have much experience cooking, we can all afford at some points during our lives to come back to the basics of cooking and turn to simple means of nourishing and feeding ourselves. Keeping things simple takes away the intimidation of cooking and empowers us to create meals that fit our own lifestyles and likes.

In her book, *In the Green Kitchen*, Alice Waters makes this statement: “At home in their own kitchens, even the most renowned chefs do not consider themselves to be chefs; there, they are simply cooks, preparing the simple, uncomplicated food they like best. Preparing food like that does not have to be hard work. On the contrary, the whole process—thinking about food, deciding what you want to eat, shopping for ingredients, and, finally, cooking and eating—is the purest pleasure, and too much fun to be reserved exclusively for ‘foodies.’ Cooking creates a sense of well-being for yourself and the people you love and brings beauty and meaning to everyday life. And all it requires is common sense—the common sense to eat seasonally, to know where your food comes from, to support and buy from local farmers and producers who are good stewards of our natural resources, and to apply the same principles of conservation to your own kitchen.”

So by default we’ve all conquered the first hurdle of cooking which is choosing high-quality, delicious ingredients. The reason Richard and I get up every morning is to do our job of producing high-quality, delicious vegetables for you and your family. If you start with high quality ingredients in the height of their season, you often don’t need anything more than a simple preparation with a little salt, pepper

This Week’s Box

GARLIC SCAPES: Put scapes in a glass of water on your kitchen counter and admire their unique beauty until you are ready to use them. Use them in any recipe you would normally use a garlic clove. The entire scape is edible.

PURPLE SCALLIONS: Use scallions in the recipes featured in this week’s newsletter!

ASPARAGUS: Sadly, we may be in our final week of asparagus harvest. Consider making asparagus risotto with lemon and mushrooms.

BABY BOK CHOI: See this week’s vegetable feature and recipes!

RHUBARB: Don’t forget you can easily freeze rhubarb for later use. Just wash and dry the stalks. Cut into small pieces and place the rhubarb in a freezer bag.

SALAD MIX: Create a quick side dish for any meal by tossing salad mix with a light vinaigrette. Top with toasted seeds or nuts for some crunch.

BABY WHITE TURNIPS: Check out last week’s newsletter for more information and recipes featuring baby white turnips.

GREEN BOSTON LETTUCE: The cupped leaves on this head of lettuce make great wraps! Use them in place of tortillas or bread and fill them with chicken salad or even taco meat.

RED OAK LETTUCE: Put a pile of this crunchy lettuce onto your next sandwich. Try a combo of bacon, lettuce and avocado...to hold us over until the tomatoes are ready this summer.

CILANTRO: Coarsely chop cilantro and add it as a garnish to dishes such as the Spicy Pork Noodles with Bok Choi featured in this week’s newsletter.

FRENCH BREAKFAST RADISHES: Add thinly sliced radishes to salads or sandwiches. You can also make a quick-pickled radish and use it as a taco topping.

and maybe a splash of oil or vinegar or a squeeze of lemon. That’s something we can all do!

I’d like to introduce another cookbook author with some unique perspectives on how to approach cooking. Alana Chernila’s book, *The Homemade Kitchen*, is all about laying out the basics, and making food and cooking approachable for everyone by simply relying on learning the basics. The first section of her book is entitled: “Start Where You Are.” In her introduction she asks a simple question. “So why do I cook? To eat, of course. But there’s more to it. And that’s where this book comes in. I cook because feeding myself is the one basic, essential, daily requirement that I can do entirely in my own way.... Not only do I get to eat what I’ve made, I also get to delight in my ability to create it.” Throughout Alana’s book, she provides a roadmap for maneuvering the basics of cooking. For example, there are two pages that clearly and simply outline the basic procedures for how to cook an egg. Once you learn how to prepare this simple food, you can branch off and do all kinds of things with eggs! They can make a simple lunch accompanied by a fresh green salad. You can eat them for breakfast scrambled with

seasonal vegetables, or you can turn them into a quiche to serve for dinner. “But I don’t know how to make pie crust!” Don’t worry, Alana guides you through the simple steps for how to make a basic pie crust. And with that basic knowledge you can make not only quiche, but you can create a squash pie to serve at Thanksgiving dinner, make a delicious rhubarb pie in the spring, or enjoy peach cobbler in the summer! As Alice Waters states in her book, this is what all good cooks have in common “...a set of basic techniques that free cooks from an overdependence on recipes and a fear of improvisation.” She goes on to say “The value of learning a foundation of basic techniques is that once these skills become instinctive, you can cook comfortably and confidently without recipes, inspired by the ingredients you have.There is enormous pleasure in cooking good food simply and in sharing the cooking and the eating with friends and family. I think it is the best antidote to our overstressed modern lives. And there is nothing better than putting a plate of delicious food on the table for the people you love.”

So I encourage you to outfit yourself with a few simple tools and get into the kitchen. Keep it simple and have fun. When you are

limited with time or creative ideas, just keep it simple. Roast a potato, steam some broccoli, make a simple green salad with a basic vinaigrette. We all deserve to eat good, healthy, nutritious food and preparing food doesn't have to be complicated. Keep it simple, eat well and most importantly take time to enjoy the foods that nourish you.

If you're looking for a basic resource to help you learn some basic cooking concepts, I'd highly recommend either of the books I cited above.

In the Green Kitchen by Alice Waters

The Homemade Kitchen by Alana Chernila

Featured Vegetable of the Week: Baby Bok Choi

by Andrea Yoder

We added baby bok choy to our repertoire of vegetables several years ago and it quickly became one of our "staple" crops that we now plant every week for as many as 20 weeks during our growing season. It is a mild-flavored Asian green that is related to some of our other favorites such as tat soi and hon tsai tai. We like the versatility of baby bok choy as it is tender enough to be eaten both raw in salads and cooked. It is one of nature's fast foods as it only takes a few minutes at most to stir-fry, saute or steam it. I usually slice the stems of baby bok choy separate from the leaves. If cooking, I give them a few additional minutes of cooking time before adding the leaves.

Before using the bok choy you will need to take a moment to clean it. Fill a sink with cold water and trim the base of the bok choy to allow the leaves to separate from the main stem. Swish the leaves in the water, and then check the base of each leaf. You may need to wash a little dirt off the base of the stem. If you are cooking the bok choy, remove the greens from the water and shake off excess water. If you are going to use the bok choy in a salad, you'll want to dry them a little more in a salad spinner or put them in a kitchen towel and carefully shake them to remove excess moisture.

Bok choy may be added to seasonal stir-fries, lightly steamed or sautéed and eaten alongside steamed rice and fish, or even cut in half and lightly cooked on a hot grill. If you'd prefer to eat bok choy raw in a salad, simply dress the greens with a light vinaigrette.

Yield: 4-5 servings

Bok Choi Salad with Sesame-Almond Crunch

Sesame-Almond Crunch

1 cup slivered almonds
2 Tbsp sugar
½ cup sesame seeds, toasted

Dressing

3 Tbsp sugar
¼ cup grapeseed oil (may substitute sunflower oil)
2 Tbsp rice vinegar
2 Tbsp soy sauce
4-6 green onions, thinly sliced
1½ pounds baby bok choy, washed and dried

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spread slivered almonds in a single layer on a baking sheet and bake for 7 to 10 minutes, until golden brown. Set aside.
2. Sprinkle 2 Tbsp sugar in an even layer over the bottom of a saucepan set over medium heat. The moment the sugar is completely liquefied, add almonds, stirring briskly to coat, then add sesame seeds, stirring until evenly distributed. Do this quickly, so that the mixture does not burn. Immediately transfer nut mixture to a plate and let cool.
3. In the same saucepan, bring the dressing ingredients to a boil: sugar, oil, vinegar, soy sauce and whisk until sugar is dissolved. Add sliced green onions and remove from heat. Dressing can be used while warm or cool.
4. Meanwhile, slice the bok choy crosswise into ½-inch pieces. Just before serving, place bok choy in a large bowl and toss with dressing. Add the nut mixture and toss well.

Note from the HVF Test Kitchen: This original recipe calls for 1 ½ pounds of bok choy, however you only received about 1 pound in your box this week. I would recommend mixing only the portion of salad you are going to eat at a given time with the dressing and sesame-almond crunch. Save any extra dressing and sesame-almond crunch to use with other greens such as hon tsai tai, turnip greens or salad mix.

**Recipe borrowed from www.alexandracooks.com

Spicy Ginger Pork Noodles with Bok Choi

Yield: 4 servings

12-16 oz baby bok choy
1-inch piece fresh ginger
Kosher salt, to taste
8 oz rice noodles, not too thin
2-3 Tbsp peanut oil or sunflower oil, divided
1 pound ground pork
¼ cup plus 1 ½ Tbsp soy sauce

2 Tbsp rice wine vinegar, divided
2 ½ cups sliced fresh mushrooms (shiitake, cremini, oyster, etc)
½ cup thinly sliced scallions
3 garlic scapes, finely chopped
1 fresh or dried thai chili (may substitute red pepper flakes)
2 Tbsp sesame seeds, toasted
1 ½ tsp sesame oil, more for drizzling
Cilantro, coarsely chopped, for serving
Basil, thinly sliced, for serving

1. Trim bok choy and separate the green tops from the stems; leave the tops whole and thinly slice the stems. Peel the ginger and finely chop it. Set bok choy and ginger aside.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add noodles and cook according to package instructions. Drain and run under cool water; drain again. Set aside.
3. Heat 1 Tbsp peanut or sunflower oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add pork and cook, breaking up with a fork, until golden and cooked through, about 10 minutes. Season with salt, 1 ½ Tbsp soy sauce and ½ Tbsp rice wine vinegar. Use a slotted spoon to transfer meat to a bowl.
4. Add remaining 1-2 Tbsp oil to skillet. Add the mushrooms and ginger. Sauté several minutes or until the mushrooms are softened. Add garlic scapes, scallions and chile. Cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add bok choy stems and a pinch of salt. Cook until bok choy is almost tender, about 1-2 minutes. Toss in leaves and return pork to skillet.
5. Toss cooked noodles, remaining ¼ cup soy sauce and 1 ½ Tbsp rice vinegar in the pan. Cook until just warmed through.
6. Add sesame seeds, sesame oil and stir to combine.
7. Serve with fresh herbs as a garnish and an additional drizzle of toasted sesame oil as desired.

This recipe was adapted from a recipe by Melissa Clark which was featured on *New York Times Cooking* (cooking.nytimes.com).