



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993
Twin Cities Edition - Brown Week Delivery

July 9, 2009

Garlic for Life

by Chef Bri and Farmer Richard

More than just a vegetable, garlic is a kitchen staple. Because of its terrifically convenient ability to preserve itself in a papery skin, we are able to easily enjoy garlic year-round. If you're like me, you have probably taken for granted that this easy-to-store veggie never goes out of season and you can grab some at the grocery store any time you want; it will keep for weeks in your kitchen, so you can just grab and peel a clove whenever you need it.

With the garlic varieties we grow at HVF, you may begin to think about garlic in a new way. Hopefully, one of the more rewarding aspects of your CSA experience is the chance to try new things. Even as basic and familiar as a bulb of garlic may be, we try to supply our boxes with an interesting variety of garlic in its different forms. Kitchen staple that it is, we want to make sure that some type of garlic shows up in each week's box. So far this year, we have enjoyed green garlic, the shoot of the young plant as it first emerges from the ground and is tender enough to use whole; then garlic scapes, the curly stalk that begins to develop and eventually forms the blossom. As of last week, we are now getting the first-dug garlic bulbs of the year. The bulbs you are receiving in your boxes now are fresh, meaning that they have not been cured, or dried. You may notice subtle differences in flavor or cooking properties compared with the dried bulbs available the rest of the year. As our garlic harvesting continues, we have already begun the process of curing bulbs for the fall and winter.

GROWING:

There are two main types of garlic – soft neck and hard neck. The soft neck garlic is the standard of the conventional garlic industry. While its many slivers of hard to peel cloves may be the most profitable per acre, we prefer the hard neck varieties that may produce less pounds per acre, and require a huge investment in planting stock, but are so much more user friendly

Please be mindful when picking up your CSA shares.
Check your name and only your name off the checklist at your site,
and only pick up the shares that are listed with your name.

THIS WEEK'S BOX

FRESH GARLIC: Cook carefully- the fresh garlic seems to scorch more quickly than dry garlic. Keep an eye on it and remove from heat if it starts to brown at all.

WHITE CIPOLLINI ONIONS: See veggie feature on back

RED OR CHIOGGIA BEETS: Roast, peel, quarter, and toss with salt and a little bit of balsamic vinegar. Serve hot or cold.

FENNEL: Try slicing thin and adding to coleslaw.

CARROTS: Use promptly while they are still crisp. If you plan to wait a few days, remove the green tops (keep for another use – they are edible!) and store carrots in a bag in the crisper drawer.

THAI BASIL: Stir into a light noodle soup.

CUCUMBERS OR SUMMER SQUASH: Slice the squash thinly and sauté lightly in olive oil with a pinch of thyme until softened. Makes a good toast substitute with your morning eggs. Slice the cucumber and add to a salad or veggie tray.

SUGAR SNAP OR SNOW PEAS: Trim and sauté just long enough to leave them slightly crisp, shake with salt and a little bit of pepper, and serve as a delicious side dish for any meal.

BABY BOK CHOI: Steam and use to garnish fish.

SALAD MIX: Makes a refreshing light lunch.

CAULIFLOWER: Steam lightly, refrigerate, and make a cool snack with a creamy dip.

with large, easy peeling cloves. Plus, we get to use the garlic scape that soft necks do not produce.

Garlic is one of the crops for which we save our own seed. Unfortunately, there are no other good sources where we can buy good, large, disease free bulbs for planting. We have tried them all and gotten *very* mixed results, but mostly small, disease riddled stock that rarely produces nice bulbs. What to do? We have spent the last 20 years selecting the best bulbs from dozens of varieties and multiplying them out to produce our own selected strains. We select the biggest and best heads for re-planting. When the cloves are large and few per head (the best to use in the kitchen) it requires the best ¼ of our crop to save to replant. That means we select almost \$10,000 worth of premium garlic, break it up and stick it in the cold, wet ground in mid-October in the hopes of getting a good crop the following July. We cover it with mulch/fertilizer and water heavily with the undy-

ing optimism that farming requires and we hope and pray for that bumper crop of huge garlic bulbs.

We started harvesting garlic last week. We are satisfied to be harvesting a modest sized crop with some winter loss/some disease loss, but hopefully enough for *most* of the rest of the season's boxes. Or am I counting chickens that have not yet hatched? Only half of our garlic is in to dry! We spend as much time as possible each day now to get it in to dry. A prolonged wet period could still mean a huge loss due to rot!

CULINARY & MEDICINAL USES:

I remember when I started learning to cook as a kid, my old-school relationship to garlic was very polite and proper, as learned from my mother's cookbooks such as *The Joy of Cooking*: garlic should be a subtle background flavor, and by no means should it ever overwhelm the dish. Well, I went away to college and got completely out of control, hanging around

with all kinds of characters and experimenting. I got daring. I tried it roasted. I started using garlic raw. Garlic wasn't just for pasta anymore. It turned into a gateway ingredient for me. Before you knew it, I was into stuff like toasted sesame oil. Seaweed. Pumpkin seeds.

Whether you prefer to use a pinch here and a dab there, or pull out all the stops and completely go wild with the garlic, it's always fun to try it in something new, or prepared in a new way. If you've never roasted garlic before, this is definitely a technique to try your hand at. (See the garlic guidesheet on our website for directions.) If you've never used garlic raw before, I also recommend giving it a try-but tread lightly until you are sure if you are going to like it. Raw garlic packs some heat. For me, using the heat of raw garlic in a dish is like the intense experience created by spicy peppers or horseradish. It's not for everyone. Be sure you have it minced very finely, or use a garlic press. Raw garlic is best mixed into a vehicle such as an oil or dressing, mayonnaise, pesto, etc.

Besides the gastronomic thrill, there are other reasons to go heavy on the garlic. When we talk about the health benefits of a diet rich in fresh, natural foods, garlic always tops the list. Garlic is one of nature's strongest antibacterial agents; it has been shown in studies to help lower blood pressure and LDL cholesterol; it has antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties, and is high in antioxidants, which help protect against cancer and other chronic diseases. It has a variety of uses as a home remedy, and is also just an all-around good food to include in your diet. It should also be noted that many (but not all) of garlic's chemical compounds are weakened or destroyed if the garlic is cooked. So, for health purposes, if you and your loved ones can stand it, it's not a bad idea to cultivate a taste for raw garlic. As a general rule, if I have a physical ailment, I pretty much always try throwing some garlic at it before trying anything else. This may be because I am cheap and don't wish to go to the doctor, but with such a versatile array of applications, it's worth a shot. Garlic truly is one of nature's wonder drugs.

Garlic growing at HVF is a not-for-profit venture, but deemed a necessity for our kitchens, our health, and yours. Please enjoy it every day and be healthy!

Veggie Feature: Cipollini Onions

Just as we are getting our first fresh garlic bulbs of the year, white cipollinis are among our first fresh onions of the year. Like the uncured garlic, these tender young onions are meant to be used fresh, not stored. You will notice that they do not have the characteristic papery outer skin layers of winter storage onions. They do not need to be peeled; you can use the whole thing. In fact, you can even continue to use the green tops as you have been using scallions all season.

Cipollini onions, recognizable by their flattened shape, are sweet and mild. Our fast-growing cipollini variety is harvested early and used fresh; the slower-growing cipollini is harvested later and cured for storage. The early cipollinis are lower in sulfur compounds, which makes their flavor more mild. They are great raw, compared to storage onions which are higher in sulfur compounds. Try them sliced on a burger or sandwich. They are also delicious roasted or caramelized, due to their high sugar content. To caramelize, slice thin and sauté slowly in butter or oil over low heat until medium-brown. Use them to top a steak or baked potato. Cipollinis also make a great addition to salads of all types.

Store fresh cipollinis in the fridge and use within a week.

Fun with Cipollinis

Here's a handful of ideas for your fresh cipollinis, to get you started:

- Skewer whole and cook on the grill
- Sauté with fresh garlic until soft, splash with red wine, and stir in a few crumbles of blue cheese to make a flavorful sauce for steak or chicken
- Pulse in a blender with cucumber and plain yogurt to make a simple tsatsiki sauce for gyros or falafel.
- Cook with peas and our lovely little carrots for a comforting trio of sweet summer veggies.
- For a quick dinner, try thin-sliced roast beef, stoneground mustard, sliced cipollinis, a handful of salad mix, and Swiss cheese on a roll.

Beet greens and cipollini

Serves 2-3

Greens from 1 bunch of beets, rinsed
1 bunch of fresh cipollini onions
2 Tbsp olive oil
½ tsp salt
Fresh ground pepper

1. Cut the onions from their greens and set the tops aside. Trim root end off of onions and cut in half lengthwise.
2. Chop beet greens and onion greens into bite-sized pieces.
3. Heat oil over low flame in a medium sized skillet. Cook onions for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned.
4. Stir in chopped onion tops and beet tops. Stir and cook about 5 more minutes, or until greens are completely wilted. Season with salt and pepper.

Friendly Reminder:

If you can't pick up during open hours on delivery day, make alternate arrangements with your site coordinator ahead of time.

Your site coordinator's contact info can be found in the CSA calendar/manual.

Pick one up at your site and keep it handy all season long!