



Harmony Valley Farm

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

May 13, 2010

Spring Planting by Farmer Richard

"Every year is different" and this spring was certainly different from any of the 37 years I have been growing vegetables! Mostly in a good way, except our work on many winter projects and improvements was cut short when the fields were ready in the third week of March. The beautiful new tool room, the cold frame greenhouse and new cow fence will have to wait for a rainy day. On March 24, we planted our first salad greens, radishes, spinach and cilantro.

The weather continued warm and unusually dry until these last couple cool weeks. The planting schedule we made this winter started with first plantings on April 12. In fact, by that date we were on planting #3 and #7 went in today!

All of our cool weather greenhouse transplants are in the field including the second planting of broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts, planted into our new fields on neighbor (and plumber) Charlie's land. These fields had been in CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) for 20 years, abandoned, grown up to brush, box elder trees and the worst – small willow trees, 1 or 2 per square foot. Vicente spent many days pulling small trees with the brush puller mounted on the forks of the skid steer loader and Richard spent many hours pushing piles of those willows into huge burn piles with the bulldozer, along with the larger box elder trees. Rafael, Manuel and Angel spent days picking up branches by hand and adding them to the larger burn piles.

There is certainly some enjoyment in pushing over junky box elder trees with a bulldozer. Jack the dog even learned it was more fun and safer to be on the bulldozer instead of running around dodging falling trees. One field is very near an eagle's nest, but our activity did not seem to bother them. The real joy for all of us was planting our first crops on these hard won acres, with the hope that these cole crops will grow strong and disease free on this new, virgin land.

Other crops are doing equally well! Two plantings of beets and carrots are up

THIS WEEK'S BOX

SPINACH: A super food rich in antioxidants and vitamins A, C, E, and K, lutein, calcium and the list goes on. Great for salads or sauté with garlic in oil till spinach is wilted, then drain off moisture.

ARUGULA OR SALAD MIX: Wilt the arugula and use in a quesadilla; or make a pasta dish, pesto or use in soups and salads.

PARSNIPS: Cut into matchsticks and put in salads, stir-fries or just enjoy fresh. Works great in stews too!

SUNCHOKES: Slice as thin as possible, coat in oil and bake at 400°F for 15–20 minutes for tasty sunchoke chips. Or, dice small, sauté in oil with garlic until tender, add cream and puree.

SORREL: Makes a great pesto! Or, try adding chopped leaves to hot split pea soup just before serving.

NETTLES: See veggie feature on the back for more information.

RHUBARB: Rhubarb muffins, cobbler and cookies are just a few ideas. Try in savory dishes too! Cook with chicken dishes to enhance the flavor. Thanks to our Amish neighbors for sharing their rhubarb to supplement our young patch.

CHIVES: The smallest member of the onion family. Chop up and put in your burgers before grilling or in breads for a savory treat.

RED RADISH: Use the greens in salads along with the radish or use in soups and stir-fries. Clip off greens, wrap in plastic and store in the fridge for up to a week.

HON TSAI TAI: A flowering bok choy and a mild Asian green from the mustard family. Try Hon Tsai Tai along with spinach, arugula, sunchoke, sorrel and asparagus in lasagna; just layer and enjoy.

GREEN GARLIC: Leaves and all, these young garlic plants sweeten when cooked and are great raw in salads too. Use green garlic anywhere garlic is called for; green garlic can be stored in the fridge for three to five days.

GARDEN HERB PACK: One for each Veggie share box, not for each household. Sharing households should share one pack! Plant in your garden or put into a larger pot on your patio, or even in a sunny window in your kitchen. This is your way to enjoy fresh herbs in your culinary adventures throughout the season. Basil is sensitive to cool temperatures, so cover or move inside if the temps drop below 50°F.

and cultivated. Parsnip and parsley root crops have been flame weeded, are up and also cultivated. Onions are out and growing, the lettuce, fennel & celeriac have been transplanted out to the field. Yes, we did a large planting of celery also (editor's note: Richard had been resistant to growing celery for the CSA for many years, but after a very well received experiment with it last year, decided to try it again this season!). Two crops of delicious peas are up and growing, loving the rainy cool weather. The first planting of corn and beans are up, but still vulnerable to a late freeze.

This is really a fantastic start to the season and we are keeping up with weed control on all of the crops, including the strawberries, which look great! They are already in full bloom and certain to be early to ripen. We weeded the rhubarb and the young plants we had planted the last few years are really looking good! We planted 15,000 new asparagus crowns this spring and all are up and luckily did not freeze off this last cold weekend – wow, that was close. We will continue to supplement our own rhubarb and asparagus crops with pickings from our Amish neighbors, Elmer Beechy & David Troyer.

We planted a new field of strawberries this year and last year's planting of nettles is in this box. The new burdock crop looks very good also (Yes, we even grow what many consider weeds!)

The early, warm weather pushed the already short (about 4 weeks) ramp and overwintered spinach seasons to an unusually early end. We sent the final harvests in

last week's first box of the season. Now the weather has changed to unseasonably cold and the asparagus has almost stopped growing.

What do we think of "global warming"? We think it is real, but misnamed. It is "global climate change". On average perhaps warmer, but what you and I experience is more dramatic and unpredictable swings from hot to cold, dry to wet. What's next? It's anybody's guess!

The Black Angus cattle look great on their lush green pasture and the pigs are coming soon. The chefs are here and we are eating well. We hope you can join us for lunch and a tour one day. Mark your calendars for the farm parties: Strawberry Day on June 20, the Summer Barn Dance on July 10, and the Harvest Party on September 26. The valley is beautiful and we are on a roll!

Sunchoke and Nettle Soup

1½ lbs sunchokes, washed and cut into ¼ inch pieces, store in ice water until needed
4T butter
1 green garlic, washed and cut into ¼ inch pieces
1 small onion, medium diced
¾ cups vegetable or chicken stock
½ bunch nettles, washed and any tough stems removed
2 cups heavy cream
Salt and pepper to taste
½ bunch of chives, sliced thin for garnish

-Melt the butter in a medium saucepot over medium heat.
-Add the garlic and onion. Sweat until softened about 4 minutes.
-Drain the sunchokes, add to the pot, and cook for 1 minute.
-Add the stock and simmer until the sunchokes are soft, about 30-40 minutes.
-Add the nettles and simmer for 5 minutes.
-Take off the heat and add the cream. Blend with a hand blender or in a regular blender until smooth.
-Return to heat and bring up to a simmer. Season with salt and pepper. Garnish with chopped chives.
Serves 4-6

Vegetable Feature: Nettles

Nettles are one of nature's hidden jewels disguised by its protective stinging hairs. There are about 30-40 species of wild nettles but the "stinging" nettle is the most common nettle that grows wild throughout the United States. If you've encountered these nettles in the moist woodlands or along rivers where they grow wild, you probably have felt the irritating sting. Have no fear, the crew collected the nettles (with gloves on of course) and washed them well to mellow the sting. Nettles are perennials and most are wild, but at Harmony Valley this is the first year that we have cultivated them. Last year, Richard let some nettles flower and then dried out the seeds. He planted the tiny, dust like nettle seeds last spring. They have filled in the bed and are expanding outward from there. We are all very happy to be growing nettles.

Nettles have a flavor similar to spinach and can be cooked in the same manner. Before using the nettles, give them another good wash. Some people are more sensitive to the sting of nettles, so if using them for the first time use tongs or gloves to handle them when washing. After they are washed again, the stinging solution will be diluted. Pluck the leaves and small stems from the hollow stalks and you are ready to start cooking! Although the young nettle leaves may be eaten raw if minced fine, cooking nettles is the most popular way to go. They are most frequently used in soups and sauces. Add the fresh nettles about 10 minutes before the soup or sauce is finished. They can also be blanched and pureed, then added to pasta dough or any type of batter. Try adding nettle puree to a savory pancake batter and serve with smoked salmon, crème fraîche, and chives. Like spinach, nettles go well with cream sauces and in egg dishes and pestos. Nettles should be eaten within a few days. If you find that you haven't gotten to them yet, blanch and refrigerate or freeze. You can also dry the leaves and use for tea.

Nettles have been used not only as food, but as medicine, fiber, and dyes since the Bronze Age. They are high in calcium, iron, and potassium and are a good source of vitamin A and C which makes them a great antioxidant. Nettles are also ten percent protein, more than any other vegetable. They are reported to relieve eczema and seasonal allergies, lower blood pressure, and make your hair thicker and shinier among many other things. Making tea is a great way to benefit from the nutrients nettles have to offer. Use ¼ cup of nettles per quart of water. Bring water to a boil and pour over the leaves. Let steep for 20 minutes then strain. You can either drink hot or serve over ice.

Nettle Pasta Dough

1 cup (4oz) AP flour
1 1/3 cup (8oz) semolina flour, or use all AP flour
½ tsp salt
7 egg yolks
1 whole egg
½ tsp extra virgin olive oil
½ cup nettle puree (see below)



Making the dough with a stand mixer:

Mix the flours and salt using the dough attachment on a stand mixer. While mixing on low speed add the eggs and nettle puree. Slowly pour the oil until incorporated. Mix the dough on low speed until it comes together and forms a ball, about 3 minutes. Mix on medium speed for 5 minutes. Turn out onto a floured surface and shape the dough into a disk. Wrap and let rest for an hour. Roll the pasta out ¼ in thick and cut into desired shape.

Making the dough by hand:

Make a well with the flours; add salt, oil, eggs, and nettle puree to the well and mix together slowly. Once everything is mixed together, knead for about 10 minutes. Shape the dough into a disk. Wrap and let rest for an hour. Roll the pasta out ¼ in thick and cut into desired shape.

When cooking fresh pasta make sure to cook in a generous amount of salted, boiling water. Serve nettle pasta with a cream based sauce and your favorite vegetables. Nettle pasta is also great drizzled with olive oil and fresh pearsan.

Nettle Puree

1 bunch nettles
2T butter

Salt and pepper to taste

-Bring 4 quarts of water to a boil. Add the nettles and blanch until bright green, about 1 ½ minutes. Strain into a colander and run cold water over to cool. Squeeze the excess water from the nettles. Puree the nettles with butter in a blender until smooth. Season with salt and pepper

Nettle puree can be used in pasta dough, batters, or added to any soup or sauce.