



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

May 12, 2011



## 3 Cooks & a Farmer By Andrea

This past weekend we had the pleasure of spending Sunday afternoon with a longtime friend of the farm, Chef Odessa Piper. Odessa spent a large portion of her life behind the helm of L' Etoile restaurant in Madison, Wisconsin from 1976 to 2005. One of the driving forces behind L'Etoile that set it apart from the crowd and laid the foundation for an amazing evolution of cuisine was Odessa's passion for embracing local and seasonal ingredients and the sustainability of local agriculture. Enter Richard de Wilde. Richard started selling vegetables in the Madison market in 1986. While Odessa was looking for ways to extend her pantry of ingredients in a Wisconsin four-season climate, Richard was looking for ways to extend the growing season within the same climate. These two visionaries teamed up and, each in their own ways, worked very hard to develop the local and seasonal ingredient pool and cuisine of southern Wisconsin. This was long before the local food movement or the "Know your farmer" campaign. Richard searched seed catalogs from around the world, trying everything and learning what would grow in Wisconsin and how to store it. Odessa was bringing seeds and tubers to Richard too—"try to grow this!" Many new crops came out of those years of exchange—burdock, crosnes, scarlet and gold turnips, and the amazing Beauty Heart Radish. These two never stop—the exchanges continued this past Sunday as Odessa left with a bag of the beloved beauty heart radish and left an Anise Hyssop plant with Richard (after singing its praises as one of her most beloved herbs).

One of the reasons for Odessa's visit was to gather some research for the book she is working on that includes the historical relationship of Harmony Valley Farm and L' Etoile Restaurant. When Odessa arrived, it was like receiving an old friend. Hugs were exchanged and a very proud Richard offered Odessa and her guests, Matthew and Josh, a

## THIS WEEK'S BOX

**PARSNIPS:** What a wonderful addition to the Spring table; parsnips freshly harvested crisp and sweet. They can be baked, boiled, sautéed, or steamed. My favorite is mashed with chopped chives and butter. Refrigerate in a plastic bag up to 2 weeks. Parsnips contain small amounts of iron and vitamin C.

**SUNCHOKES:** The raw, ivory colored flesh of the Jerusalem Artichoke (Sunchoke) has a crisp texture like a potato and a sweet nutty flavor. It is eaten raw, or cooked. They may be peeled or, because the skin is very thin, simply wash well and eat skin on. Good source of iron.

**RAMPS:** Also known as wild leeks, ramps have a garlicky-onion flavor and are available March-June. Wrap tightly and refrigerate up to one week. Trim the root ends and wash well when ready to use. Eat raw or cooked in similar ways that you would use scallions or onions.

**OVERWINTERED SPINACH:** Rich in minerals, proteins, and vitamins including calcium, potassium, and vitamins A, B, & C. Can be eaten fresh in salads, sautéed or added to your favorite omelette. A tasty addition to soups or included in a creamy pasta dish.

**BLACK RADISH:** I like to peel and slice the crisp black radish and sprinkle it with a bit of sea salt and enjoy the slightly sharp bite on my tongue. When cooked briefly they are a delicious accompaniment to pan fried meat. Use in salads, soups and stir-frys.

**SORREL:** Sorrel adds a lemon like tang when used raw in salads, or cooked in soups. It is a nice addition to fish recipes and I have used it in vegetable lasagna. High in Vitamin A and contains some calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and Vitamin C.

**CHIVES:** The beautiful green chives have a mild onion flavor and make an attractive addition when chopped in potatoes, parsnips, or as a garnish for meats. A very versatile herb that can be frozen for future use.

**WATERCRESS:** Cool running water is the growing ground for this member of the mustard family. Watercress has small, crisp, peppery, dark green leaves that work well in salads, sandwiches, soups and especially as a garnish to enhance a dish. Wash and shake dry just before using. Store stems down in a glass of water covered with a plastic bag.

**NETTLES:** See vegetable feature in this newsletter.

facilities tour to show them where and how we accomplish our work. Throughout the course of the afternoon, stories were shared, pictures were taken, and we went on many excursions down memory lane. After a light rain shower, we piled into a truck and took a drive through the fields. Along the way we discussed a wide variety of topics including....how does overwintered spinach overwinter and why is this so important? Of course politics came up several times over the course of the evening. "These are interesting times," said Richard as he made reference to the recent President's Panel on cancer which recommended foods grown without pesticides and animals raised on pasture. And don't forget the recent UN agricultural report that touts small scale, diversified organic farms as a more "productive" way to feed the world than global shipping of high tech chemical inputs and patented seeds. The battle has already begun. We talked about cover crops and soil health. We even stopped and dug up a vetch plant to see if it was starting to develop nitrogen nodules—the result of a symbiotic relationship with a bacteria that is able to fix nitrogen from the air on the roots of a vetch plant. At one point on the tour, Odessa very thoughtfully stated, "I find that the foods that come from

Harmony Valley Farm's fields are uniquely delicious and flavorful. It's like a miracle. It's a remarkable thing."

After the tour, we returned to the house where we moved into the next phase of conversation while dinner was prepared. It was fascinating to see Odessa transition from researcher/writer to chef as she tied her white apron and pulled together her culinary team, Chefs Boni & Brigitte, for a pre-dinner planning meeting. Chef Boni and Brigitte listened as Odessa introduced her thoughts, and then the three bounced ideas back and forth until a plan was pulled together. It was decided we would have a simple dinner including fresh trout baked in parchment paper and a simple green salad. While dinner was in the works, we indulged ourselves with nibbles of delicious Wisconsin artisan cheeses including Bleu Mont Dairy's raw aged cheddar and Pleasant Ridge Reserve. Odessa cracked open a jar of pickled crab apples to complement the cheeses as we sipped on hard cider. I failed to mention the pile of hickory nuts that would become not only our pre-dinner snack but also our dessert. Let the fun begin. With cutting boards in place, each chef assumed her position. Boni commandeered the task of taking the pin bones out of the trout. Brigitte put together

the cheese platter and grated cheese for the salad, and Odessa sliced fresh mushrooms to layer on the fish, dressed them with Wisconsin sunflower oil and salt and let them start to wilt in the oven. Not wanting to waste energy, Odessa decided to take advantage of the preheating oven and toast the hickory nuts in the oven, lightly tossed with sunflower oil and salt. Meanwhile, Brigitte moved on to zesting a lemon for the salad...and Boni continued to pull the pin bones. Time to praline the toasted hickory nuts. Brigitte stepped up to the plate for instructions. Warm cast iron skillet, add maple syrup and watch it start to simmer. As the syrup began to reduce down, the nuts were added and continually stirred. Once the syrup started to crystallize, a sprinkling of salt was added. Once they were done, Brigitte spread them out on a sheet tray to let them cool. Richard came over with hopes of sneaking a taste, but was quickly warned not to touch the hot praline nuts until they were cooled!

As Boni continued to work the pin bones, conversation ensued as to what kind of vinaigrette would be dressing the salad of spinach and watercress. Interesting....Odessa typically dresses salads very simply in the bowl—no premade vinaigrette. As it turned out, the salad she prepared was one of the most fresh and flavorful salads I've had in a long time. Thick leaves of overwintered spinach mixed with pristine, peppery watercress, shreds of aged cheddar, chunks of pears, lemon zest and a simple drizzle of sunflower oil and lemon juice—so delicious!!! Time to assemble the trout. Parchment down on the cutting board, one person layered ramp leaves under the fish, someone else seasoned the fish and added carrots, mushrooms, chiffonade of sorrel and fresh herbs, and the last person rolled the parchment to seal the fish in its pouch. Into the oven for about 10-12 minutes. The pouches came out all puffed with steam, and when Brigitte cut them open it was divine. Simple ingredients, simple preparation, so delicious with simple, clean flavors.

As we sat down to dinner, the conversation ensued both with reminiscing as well as looking forward. Why do we do what we do? What is our hope for the future of our food and agriculture system? How will we change our food system for the better? How can we work together to do so? The evening ended as it started—with hugs and gratefulness for relationships that continue to be cultivated. There are many dimensions to farming that go beyond cultivating the soil and caring for the plants. We grow the food, but it takes individuals on the receiving end to complete the circle. We appreciate the opportunity to supply families and restaurants with high quality, nutritious vegetables. We hope our products inspire delicious meals, but our customers also inspire us!

## Vegetable Feature: Nettles

Nettles, or Stinging Nettles, get a bad rap. I'm sure you can imagine why. Nettles have jagged leaves covered with hair-like fibers that contain formic acid, which is what earns their unpleasant name.

However, truth be told, they are not only edible, but also very good for you! They have been described as a super food; high in protein, iron, vitamins A and C, calcium, magnesium and potassium. Steeped, they are used to fight allergies and extracts can be used to treat arthritis, anemia and kidney problems.

Nettles grow wild and are easy to find, but here on the farm we cultivate them! (Yes, we think they are that good!) This makes for a consistent product and more efficient harvest.

If you happen upon some nettles and wish to pick them, it is advised to wear gloves and handle as little as possible. Once harvested, remove the stems and fill your sink with cold water. Vigorously swish the leaves around with tongs and dry with a salad spinner. The nettles in this weeks box have already been washed well to remove most of the sting. However, we still recommend giving them a second wash prior to cooking.

If you are still fretting about that 'stinging' part; don't. Nettles lose their sting after being cooked, so be sure to blanch, sauté or steam your leaves before serving them. Nettles perish very quickly, but can be refrigerated or froze after blanching to save for later use. They are most classically used in teas and soups, but can also be used in place of any leafy green, such as spinach or kale. Simply substitute nettles for all or part of the greens in pesto, quiche and spanakopita or puree them and add to gnocchi dough. They can be added in with pasta and risotto dishes or used in a cheese filling for raviolis. Once cooked, they take on a gorgeous emerald color that will liven up any dish!

Nettles are a great example of a plant considered unwanted and invasive, but can really surprise you how well they lend themselves to cooking. Have fun with them!

### Cream of Nettle and Sorrel Soup

*Recipe adapted by Chef Brigitte*

Serves 4

2 T butter  
6 ramp bulbs and stems, finely sliced  
¾ bunch nettles  
1 cup sorrel  
4 cups vegetable broth  
1 cup cream

-Caramelize ramps over low heat with butter in a 4 qt sauce pan.  
-Roughly chop nettles and sorrel and add all remaining ingredients to ramps. Simmer for 10 minutes. Allow to cool slightly, then puree with blender or emulsion blender. Can be made ahead and reheated.



### Nettle Gnocchi

*Recipe adapted by Chef Brigitte*

Serves 4

4 medium potatoes, red skin or russet  
1 egg  
1 cup all purpose flour (I used half whole wheat and half whole wheat pastry flour)  
¼ cup nettles, blanched and chopped

-Rub potatoes with oil and wrap in foil and bake at 425° F until tender.  
-Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly. Cut the potatoes in half and scoop out the flesh. Mash until smooth and mix in egg and nettles. Be sure to squeeze any excess water from the nettles before you add them. Add enough flour to bind the mixture. Mix and knead with your hands until you have a dry, doughy consistency. Add some water if it is too dry and more flour if it is too wet.  
-Once you have your dough, divide it into 4 pieces and roll each piece out on a floured surface into tubes about ½" diameter. Cut the tube into 1" pieces. Place them on a sheet pan with semolina or flour and allow to set in the fridge, or freeze for later use.  
-To cook the gnocchi, prepare a sauce pan with salted, boiling water and a large frying pan with oil over med-high heat. Drop the gnocchi in the boiling water. When the gnocchi begin to float, strain and immediately and carefully drop into frying pan. Sauté until the gnocchi are golden and crisp.

*I served these with baked trout and a simple chive cream sauce, recipe below.*

### Chive cream sauce

1 T butter  
1 T flour  
1 cup cream  
1 T chives

Combine butter and flour in small sauce pan. Whisk to combine. Add cream. Simmer for one minute and add chives.

