



Harmony Valley Farm

An Update for Our Community Supported Agriculture Members

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THIS WEEK'S BOX

SALAD MIX
SPINACH
LEEKs
CELERIAC
YELLOW ONIONS
ITALIAN RED GARLIC
SWEET POTATOES
PARSNIPS
BEAUTY HEART WINTER
RADISH
CARROTS
BRUSSELS SPROUTS
RAINBOW PRODUCE ORGANIC
POTATOES (A RED SKINNED
POTATO CALLED RHODE
ESTERLING, GOOD FOR
BOILING AND ROASTING,
WITH OR WITHOUT THE
SKINS.)
FINAL WEEK FOR SALAD
SHARES -- A RECORD!

A Bedtime Story

Each fall, the process begins again -- putting the fields to bed for the winter. It begins in September, as fields are harvested for the last time, and continues in earnest throughout October. Then we finish up with the final steps early in November.

The first step is to subsoil. This involves pulling 2 shanks of steel that slice 2 vertical lines, 24 inches deep across the field. This process loosens and shatters the deeper soils. We do this because we understand that water needs to be able to move down to the water table when it rains and back up in times of drought -- capillary action. Many plants put down deep roots 2, 3 or even 10 feet. These root channels later become conduits for capillary action. Earthworms perform the same function, their tunnels serve as moisture conduits as they rise to the surface to eat decaying residue and reproduce in the warm months and burrow deep to survive the winter. Subsoiling helps that natural process.

Next, we spread compost. Fresh manure and straw has been decaying and heating in windrows all spring and summer. Over that time it becomes brown, crumbly and sweet smelling, the results of beneficial fungus, bacteria and a host of other microscopic life. The composting process stabilizes the nutrients into a form that is available to plants but does not easily wash away. We use a spreader to apply 5 - 6 tons per acre until the 300 tons of compost, piled strategically around the farm, is evenly applied.

In late September we sent small samples of dirt collected from several different fields to be analyzed in a lab. We get back a printout that tells us the amounts of major nutrients and trace minerals present. The major nutrients -- nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium -- and some trace minerals, are supplied by the compost. We supplement that with gypsum, calcium sulfate, mined in Iowa. This white, powdery rock adds, you guessed it, calcium and sulfur, also important for healthy plant growth. Finally we "sprinkle" small amounts (10 - 30 # per acre) of a trace mineral mix containing boron, zinc, and manganese in a sulfate form (more sulphur). All of this supplies the microscopic soil life with a balanced food supply, which, in turn, will supply next year's crops with a balanced diet. Which, taking it to the next logical step, supplies all of us with a rich balance of minerals in our diets.

With the water cycle aided and the nutrition needs supplied, we move on to covering the soil, protecting it physically. We loosen the top 10 inches of soil with a chisel plow and pulverize it with a field cultivator equipped with a rolling basket. The fine, loose bed is perfect for germinating the cover crop seeds we plant. Our favorite cover crop is triticale (a cereal grain created by crossing rye with wheat) and field peas. They are both green and growing right now, even after several frosts. They will, however, winter kill before spring.

We also plant rye mixed with hairy vetch in September in the fields we want to continue to be covered in spring. Both rye and vetch will survive the winter and continue to grow when the weather warms. It may baffle some of you why we plant crops we just let die in winter or that we mow or plow down in spring, but there are several very good reasons. First, the presence of plant growth on the surface of the soil is a physical protection from hard spring rains and washing winter melt water. The roots of the plants, whether dead or alive in spring, help hold the soil in place, preventing erosion. They also act to catch snowfall, keeping more of the winter moisture and insulating blanket on our fields. Deep snow is great protection from harsh winter winds. The cover crop also serves as a great winter home to beneficial spiders and beetles. And, just as important to the benefits provided by the green growth, are the benefits of the roots. The roots absorb nutrients, holding them throughout the winter and spring, then releasing them as the roots decay after the cover crop is tilled into the soil in spring or summer.

There is a great sense of accomplishment and closure to putting the farm to bed, field by field. They turn beautiful shades of green, while all around the fields and woods are drying and browning. With the cooperative fall weather, we are looking forward to finishing by the end of next week. Not all farmers plant cover crops. Before the snow covers our rural landscape, take notice of the farm fields you drive by. Many will be left untouched after harvest. Some will be fall plowed, exposing the black soil to the elements -- helps it dry out and saves a step in the spring. But cherish the patches of green where the farmer is wisely using cover crops to protect and nourish the farm's most important resource - soil.

"We feel more at home in the world when we know the farmer who grows our food." Helena Norberg-Hodge, from the book Visionaries: People and Ideas to Change Your Life.

“The Winter Boxes are Beautiful, But What Are Those Things?”

It's true, if you haven't been a CSA member for the winter months, there will likely be some items in the boxes that are unfamiliar. I recently gave a talk to a group of folks in Viroqua and had a great time discussing, guessing, smelling and tasting the many roots I had brought along. I was surprised at the ones that were recognized, sunchokes being one of them. But, it came as no surprise that the scarlet turnip was unrecognizable even to the turnip lovers, because it was disguised in a bright red skin. Don't ever be too shy to admit you don't know what's in the box. We try hard to describe everything, but once in a while, we slip up, or you miss the article in the newsletter. E-mail us if you are wondering, or use the e-group, or, first use your nose. You'd recognize the smell of a radish even if it was the first black radish you'd ever seen, right?

Anyway, you can best enjoy your produce if you know what it is, so, this week you will find:

Parsnips - like white carrots but sweeter, without the characteristic carrot taste. Saute with just a little butter until soft to get the true parsnip flavor. Very versatile -- mash, roast, boil, stew, soup, even use in muffins or cakes like carrot cake.

Beauty Heart Radish - Round, green shoulders, tan skin. Bright pink inside (no mistaking that.) We've been stirfrying them this fall, but they are also good raw, like a spring radish; in salads; use as a snack with a slice of cheese or a dab of soft feta or chevre goat cheese spread on top.

Celeriac - By now I'm guessing you all recognize the knobby, rooty ball with the green cast to be celeriac -- celery root. Lots of recipes for this increasingly popular root to be found on the internet, the food network, food magazines.

Leeks - Like long, fat scallions. Use the white part. Commercially grown leeks often have sand down deep in their cores (from being mounded with soil to blanch them. These do not, and are not very blanched. Still, it is recommended to cut off the green tops and roots, slice lengthwise, fan the layers and rinse before slicing. There are lots of leek recipes out there. Since this is the first year we have grown leeks that I have been here, I am not very familiar with them. But, I did rate the stirfry Cayce made with them, several weeks ago, as one of the best dishes of the fall, and I believe everyone else here would agree.

Sweet Potatoes -- Of course you'd recognize them if they were the same shape and size as the ones in the store. Some of you will get extra long ones, some will get extra big ones. Hey! Not all sweet potatoes fit the standard we've set for grocery store sales. They taste just as good, so enjoy!

A word about Salad Mix and Spinach - For those of you who truly love it and will miss it this winter, give thanks to our fine fall weather. It really hasn't gotten terribly cold and most of the salad has come through the frosty nights, unscathed. This is the latest we've been able to harvest such a large amount; enough for CSA members, the Salad Shares for members who ordered extra bags, and plenty for the last farmers' market, too. Makes up for the weeks in the summer when there was none. (But then there were so many other things to enjoy. . .) Is there winter, cool greenhouse-grown spinach or salad in the picture? Not this winter, and probably not in the foreseeable future.

REQUIRED READING!

This is NOT the last box, contrary to awful rumors that uninformed members pass around this time each year! The following is our winter schedule.

Nov. 2-3 - odd box pick up (All members who pick up at our market stand will now be picking up at their winter site.)

Nov. 9-10 NO BOX FOR ANYONE

Nov. 16-17 even box pick up. November beef delivery.

Nov. 23-24 NO BOX FOR ANYONE

Nov. 30 - Dec. 1 odd box pick up. Garlic braid delivery.

Dec. 7-8 NO BOX DELIVERY

Dec. 14 - 15 - even box pick up. LAST BOX FOR EVERY WEEK MEMBERS, TOO. December beef delivery.

January 5, Extra root box delivery for those who order it. (Look for forms at your delivery site next time.)

If you do not wish to continue picking up your box, let the farm know! We'll donate it to the local food pantry.

Grazier's Organic Beef is still available. The November delivery is sold out, however, there is still plenty available for the December 14 / 15th date. See the brochure at your site or our website for details.

Garlic Braids are still in good supply, too. Face it, a braid of this quality in one of those upscale gift catalogues would cost more than twice the price. They make great, original gifts for food lovers. They are surprisingly long lasting. We have to forceably remove those we've given family members as gifts and replace them with a new one each year, or they'd keep them hanging indefinitely.

DON'T FORGET -- YOU ARE INVITED TO THE ANNUAL CORE-GROUP ADVISORY MEETING.

SATURDAY, NOV. 3 AT THE FARMERS' MARKET CAFE -- GROUND FLOOR OF L'ETOILE RESTAURANT -- 27 N.

PINCKNEY. IT WILL BEGIN AFTER THE MARKET -- 2:30 P.M. BRING YOUR OPINIONS AND ADVICE ON THIS YEAR AND NEXT SEASON. THE MORE MINDS THE BETTER. HOPE YOU CAN MAKE IT

MARTHA STEWART'S BAKED PUMPKIN WEDGES

A recipe suggestion from Cheryl Thompson

1 pie pumpkin, cut in 4-5 inch wedges, scrape clean of seeds and gunk, wash rind (May substitute squash instead)

1/2 Cup heavy cream

2 Tablespoons butter

1/4 Cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon (Penzey's is wonderful)

1/4 teaspoon ground allspice

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Mix sugar, cinnamon and allspice in a small bowl.

Butter a 2-1/2 quart shallow baking dish and place wedges inside. Pour heavy cream over pumpkin wedges, coating each piece. Cut 2 T of butter into small pieces. Place on wedges in dish. Sprinkle with sugar mixture.

Bake at 350 until golden brown and fork tender (about 1 hour). Remove from oven. Cool 15 minutes. Serve warm with additional heavy cream, whipped. (ice cream would be good too) Of course do not eat skins