



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

June 25, 26, 27 2008

Know Your Weeds, by Andy Griffin

Marshmallows are made from a viscous protein solution, like gelatin, that's been whipped full of air and sugar, but once upon a time they were made out of the roots of mallows from marshes. The marsh mallow, or *Althaea officinalis*, is a weedy relative of *Gossypium hirsutum*, the cotton plant, *Althaea rosea*, the hollyhock, and *Abelmoshus esculentus*, or okra. I don't grow cotton, hollyhocks, or okra, but my farm is plagued with *Malva neglecta*, or cheeseweed, which is an annoying weed from the mallow family. If you try to pull a cheeseweed up from where it's growing in the field and sapping all the fertilizer, it's likely to break off above the ground, leaving its roots behind to re-sprout, and leaving your hands sticky. Mallows are typically viscous or mucilaginous when you crush them. There's even a mallow species that scientists have named *Bastardia viscosa var. sanctae-crucis*, or the "viscous Bastardia from Santa Cruz." It was the mallow's slime that was spun to make the earliest confectionary marshmallows. A number of different Mallow species have curative properties and are good for soothing coughs and healing wounds. Marshmallow candy was originally conceived as a palatable delivery system for the medicine. It's too bad I can't make artisanal "field mallows" for you all to roast at home.

So why do they call *Malva neglecta* "cheeseweed" when it's slimy, fibrous and tough?

Cheeseweed has a schizocarp shaped like a cheese wheel. "Schizocarp" is fancy botanical talk for a fruit that splits up into pieces. The ten seeds that make up each cheeseweed fruit fall like rain when the plant matures and remain vital in the soil for years. On bad days I think I can remember hearing a story one morning years ago on National Public Radio where some scientists discovered a ceramic jar full of seeds in an undisturbed Anasazi cave dwelling that was five thousand years old. Hoping to discover new facts about ancient agriculture, the scientists planted the ancient seeds. Only the *Malva neglecta* sprouted.

Then what can a farmer like me do to rid a plot of ground of mallow without resorting to powerful toxic chemicals that defy the ages?

First, before planting, we pre-irrigate the field we're going to plant. Mallow seeds sprout almost overnight once they've been refreshed with a drink of water. Then we plant our crop. Carrots take 14 days to germinate, and onions can take ten. After the mallow seeds have sprouted but before the crop we've sown has germinated, we pass over the weedy bed with a hand held gas torch. The mallow seedlings are tender and wilt to death at the

merest touch of flame. Bigger organic farms use tractor mounted torches. You can think of this organic flame weeding technique as "roasting field mallows" if you want. Weeding mallows from the rows is never as fun as roasting marshmallows over the coals, but one thing's for sure; no matter how much *Malva neglecta* you are able to kill there are always "smore" where they came from!

copyright 2008 Andy Griffin

Veggie Notes and Recipes

Store this week's produce in the fridge, except maybe the basil if your fridge gets too cold. The onions are fresh, not cured, so they are best kept in the fridge and used within a week. Remove beet greens from beets and cook them within a day or so; use in any chard recipe, they're closely related.

Mei Quin Choy is like baby bok choy. Here are a few ideas from the *Washington Post*: Halve lengthwise, brush with peanut oil and toss on the grill. Leave whole and braise with

chicken broth or with sautéed garlic or toasted sesame oil. Steam and drizzle with toasted sesame oil and sesame seeds. Or thinly slice and stir into a Vietnamese chicken broth, a chilled soba salad or summer minestrone just prior to serving. As with common bok choy, baby bok choy can be steamed, braised or tossed into any stir-fry.

Perhaps the simplest approach is to coarsely chop the leaves (and stalks, if desired) add them to a hot skillet slicked with peanut oil and stir-fry (with slivered garlic if desired) until wilted and, for those so inclined, barely crisped about the edges. Tuck the greens into an egg-white omelet, toss with pasta or transfer to a serving dish.

What I Would Do With This Week's Box, From Alyson, a CSA

member from Stanford: The cabbage I'd use as a good excuse to make fish tacos, but there will be lots left over so I will look forward to the newsletter for more ideas to use cabbage! The beets I would roast and dress with a simple vinaigrette. The strawberries are always so ripe and delicious; we'll probably just eat them for breakfast if we get them, but maybe toss them with a few TBS of balsamic vinegar and a little sugar to have as a special dessert. If we are lucky enough to get basil, I will definitely make our first pesto of the season (I use the recipe from Marcella's *Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*) and serve half over pasta (probably gnocchi) and the other half with a roasted chicken. If we get mint, it will go into cocktails (mojitos-recipe below) to help us beat the heat.

This Week
Mei Quin Choy ^{HG}
Bianco Di Maggio Onions ^{MF}
Baby Spinach or Baby
Erbette Chard ^{MF}
Mint OR Genovese or
Lemon Basil ^{MF}
Beets ^{HG}
Cabbage or Cauliflower ^{HG}
Mystery ^{HG}
Mystery ^{MF}
Flowers: Mixed Bouquet ^{HG,*}

The spinach I'll use to make my favorite pasta of the moment with ceci beans (chick peas) and pancetta (recipe below). Onions will probably get thrown on the grill some night when we're grilling other things. Collards will be parboiled and sautéed for a side dish, or used in another 'beans and greens' recipe similar to the ceci/spinach past recipe.

I would use radishes to make two different appetizers. First, I would sauté the radish greens quickly with a little olive oil, hot pepper, and coarse salt and then, mound it on a few lightly toasted baguette slices. Then, on some more baguette slices I would spread soft butter mixed with a few chopped herbs, and then top that with sliced radishes sprinkled with salt and pepper. It looks beautiful and it's really delicious!

Mojito

6-10 mint leaves	1-2 TBS simple syrup (more or less to taste)*
juice of half a lime	2 oz white rum
club soda	

Put the mint leaves in an old fashioned glass or tumbler. Crush them with a muddler if you have one, or the handle of a wooden spoon. Add the simple syrup and lime juice, then pack the glass with crushed ice. Add the rum then fill to the top with club soda and stir.

*Simple syrup = 1 cup sugar dissolved in a 1 cup hot water. Cool and store in an airtight container in the fridge for all your summer cocktail and iced coffee needs.

Borscht, Printed from COOKS.COM

Red beets	Carrots
Cabbage	Beef
Tomato juice or paste	Potatoes
Chopped parsley	Salt & pepper to taste
Sour cream to serve	

Slice cabbage, carrots and red beets. Cube meat into small pieces. Put all of the ingredients in water, bring to a boil and then simmer until the meat is almost cooked. Add sliced potatoes, tomato paste or juice. Add salt, pepper and chopped parsley as needed. Simmer until the meat and potatoes are cooked. Serve with sour cream.

Pasta with Ceci (Chickpeas) and Spinach, adapted from Lidia Bastianich

3 TBS olive oil	3 slices pancetta, diced fine
3 cloves garlic, crushed and sliced	1 tsp. red pepper flakes (or more)
1 can of chickpeas, rinsed and drained	1 bunch of spinach, rinsed and chopped if large
½-¾ lb. short tubular pasta (garganelli or penne are good)	¼ -1/3 cup grated pecorino romano

Put the pasta water on to boil. When it boils, add 2 T. salt. When you add the pasta to the water, begin the sauce so it all finishes at the same time. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add the pancetta and cook until it is slightly brown on the edges. Add the garlic and red pepper and cook until you really start to smell the garlic, 30 seconds to a minute. Add the chickpeas, toss to coat, and cook for one minute. Add the spinach (which should still have a little water clinging to it from washing) and toss with the contents of the

pan. Cook until the spinach is just wilted. At this point, if the pasta still has a lot of time left, remove the pan from the heat and wait until the pasta has about 2 minutes left to cook. At that point, return the skillet to the heat and add two large spoonfuls of the pasta cooking water. When the pasta is just barely done, drain and add it to the skillet, allowing it to cook with the sauce for a minute, and adding some reserved pasta cooking water if the sauce needs thinning. Remove from the heat. Taste for salt, and toss with a little fresh olive oil and the grated cheese.

Beet, Cabbage and Mushroom Borscht, adapted from cdkitchen.com

4 beets	1.5 TBS olive oil
2 cups sliced fresh mushrooms	3 large carrots, peeled and sliced
1-2 onions, chopped	1 head cabbage, shredded
1 lemon, pricked with a fork in several places	6 cups vegetable, beef or chicken stock
salt to taste	freshly ground black pepper
sugar to taste	fresh lemon juice to taste
½ cup chopped fresh dill	

Cut the greens from the beets, leaving about 2 inches of stems attached. Reserve greens for another use. Wash beets well, place them in a pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, until tender, 30 to 50 minutes, depending on the size of the beets. Drain. Cover the beets with lukewarm water. When cool, slip off the skins and dice the beets. Set aside.

In a stockpot over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the onions and carrots and cook, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes. Add the cabbage, beets, mushrooms, lemon and stock and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, until the soup is red and the flavors are blended, about 30 minutes. Remove the lemon and discard. Season with salt and pepper; taste and adjust the seasonings with sugar and lemon juice, if needed. Sprinkle with chopped dill before serving. Serves 6.

Young Fresh Spinach with Toasted Sesame

Dressing, adapted from *Vegetables The New Main Course Cookbook* by Joe Famularo and Louise Imperiale

1 pound fresh young spinach	¼ cup sesame seeds
1 tsp. sugar	4 tsp. soy sauce
¼ cup Dashi (Japanese bonito stock), or vegetable or chicken broth	

Rinse, drain, and dry the spinach. If not already toasted, toast the sesame seeds: place in ungreased skillet over low heat, stirring frequently. As soon as the seeds begin to turn golden, remove from heat and transfer to a mortar or blender. Add sugar and grind seeds to powder. Transfer to a small bowl and add soy sauce and the stock. Mix well, pour over spinach leaves, and toss.

Everything in your box and the flowers are organically grown. From Mariquita Farm: baby spinach, baby chard, mint, basil, onions, mystery. From High Ground: cabbage, cauliflower, beets, mei quin choy, mystery (summer squash or strawberries), some flowers. From Thomas Farm: some flowers.