



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

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Bane of Beelzebub, by Andy Griffin

If FDA officials ever find out about basil's intoxicating qualities they will want to regulate it. Actually, when speaking of basil, the word "intoxicating" misleads since it implies that the herb contains toxins; "euphoric" might be a better fit, since basil's fragrance is a cocktail of cinnamate, citronellol, geraniol, pinene, and eugenol, conjuring up cinnamon, citrus, geranium, pine, and clove. A whiff of this herb lifts the spirits so much that basil is practically the perfume of good health. In the Greek Orthodox tradition, basil is said to have sprouted around the tomb of Jesus after he rose from the grave. The word basil comes to us from the Greek, meaning "kingly," so it's no coincidence that this herb should be associated with the man Christian tradition considers to be King of the Jews. Of course resurrection from the dead is the cure to end all cures, but basil is recognized across many cultures as a potent medicinal herb.

In India the fragrance of basil is said to invite sattva, or harmony. One species of basil, Tulsi, or *Ocimum sanctum*, is a woody-stemmed, perennial plant that is considered sacred to Vishnu. In fact, the herb Tulsi is revered as the incarnation of the Goddess Tulsi. Amulets made of beads shaped from the stems or roots of Tulsi are worn by the reverent because the plant is valued as a demon repellent. There are many different kinds of basil, but all of them got their start in Asia before being disseminated by trade throughout the rest of the world. Even the Genovese basil, which seems as Italian as Columbus, originated in the tropics, so it is likely that basil arrived in the Mediterranean already crowned with its divine reputation.

Evil takes on many identities and one name for the Devil is Baal-zebub or "Beelzebub," which is often translated from the Hebrew as "Lord of the Flies." Because basil is credited with being able to drive off flies, vases of the pungent herb have been placed at times around the altar in Greek Orthodox churches. Some religious traditions consider Beelzebub to be a different malevolent spirit than Satan, a mere demonic lieutenant, but no one thinks of basil as an herb of secondary importance. Besides being the herbal base for pesto, basil is a good accent for summer squash dishes, rice or pasta salads, and as a leafy ingredient in savory sandwiches.

Basil is my favorite herb, and I look forward to growing it every year. I take my cues for how to cultivate basil by considering the conditions under which it evolved. Tropical Asia is warm and humid, so I wait until the soil warms up before I sow basil, and then I give the plants plenty of water.

The biggest threat that faces my basil crop comes from the *Dibrotica* beetle, which looks like a little yellow-green Ladybug. *Dibrotica* beetles are a triple threat; they chew on the basil leaves, they spread viral diseases through their saliva, and they defecate on whatever they don't consume. *Dibrotica* beetles taste nasty to the birds, and I'm not aware of any insect predator that can control them. I don't use pesticide, so my only prophylactic remedy against the threat of *Dibrotica* infestation is to cloak the basil crop with a woven fiberglass fabric or "row-cover" called Agribon, which I buy from Peaceful Valley Farm Supply.

Agribon row-cover serves me in three ways. First, the fabric is so tightly woven that it acts to completely fence out the *Dibrotica* beetles, so they can't attack the basil. We drape the Agribon over wire hoops made of #10 gauge wire that arch across the beds, forming low-profile tunnels. The hoops act to keep the fabric off the plants so that the basil leaves are not scuffed and abraded when the wind blows. We have to lift the fabric every time we harvest, and we put it back every time we finish, so that the crop is protected. The Agribon is translucent, but there are several degrees of shade created by the fabric, which is a good thing, because the basil grows just a little bit more lush and tender under the row-cover than it does under the open sun. Lastly, the aromatic oils which give basil its fragrance are volatile— that is they can blow away, as in the Italian verb *volare*, meaning "to fly away"— so the row cover breaks the wind

and keeps the herbal essence of the crop from being exported to Los Banos. Basil is at its most potent around the time the flower heads are forming, so that's when we start the harvest. When we cut the flowering stalks off before the plants have had a chance to set seed, they will send out new shoots. In time, we'll harvest those shoots too. If we're careful, we can make a single basil crop last all season long with many successive harvests, which is good for the bottom line.

Basil is supposedly good for hair too. One book on my shelf says that basil tea makes for a perfect hair conditioner and that one basil rinse will leave your coiffeur bouncing like the Breck Girl's mane. Some traditions consider basil to be an aphrodisiac. I've heard that Mexican curanderas recommend that you tuck a sprig of basil into your pocket to recapture a bored lover's wandering eye. Do any of these quasi-magical tricks work? I wouldn't know. But I am happy to grow basil, and I like to think I'm doing my part for world peace by supplying an herb that sanctifies life, invites harmony, raises hair from the head, and flavors food even as it attracts women and repels flies.

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This Week
Genovese Basil ^{MF}
Romaine Lettuce ^{HG}
Strawberries ^{HG}
Shallots ^{MF}
Red Chard ^{MF}
Mei Quin Choy OR Radishes ^{HG}
Rapini Greens ^{HG}
Tarragon OR Oregano ^{MF}
Fennel ^{HG}
Flowers: Mixed Bouquet ^{TF}

Recipes and Notes

(also see www.mariquita.com/recipes)

Jonathan's Soup Stock Recipe

Those of you with kids understand how, suddenly, kid's movies start to take over your consciousness. Each week when I come home from the farmers market, I look at the trimmings I have (the parts of the veggies that I won't actually eat) and think of the cook in "Nanny McPhee". In that movie, as punishment, the cook makes a "peelings soup" for the children. In the movie it sounds terrible, but it is actually just a stock made of the trimmings and peelings of the veggies used during the past week. It is not very far off from what we can all be doing with our own "peelings." There are all kinds of different vegetable stock variations out there, some very refined, but there is absolutely nothing wrong with a basic, all purpose veggie stock made with whatever is hanging around. Best of all, it will always be better than any store bought stock since those rely on lots of sodium and starch to create flavor and body. Let's take this week's box as an example. The "peelings" part could include the stems of the chard, unwanted (bruised or wilted) leaves of the romaine, bases of the bok choy, tough stems of rapini, fibrous stems of the fennel plus some fronds. These are all super for stock making. Add to these the oldest carrot in your fridge, an onion, a few branches of your favorite herb, some peppercorns, a bay leaf, and you've got yourself a veggie stock. (Celery and leek greens are also super to add.) Pour cold water over all these to cover (at least 8 cups), boil for 30 minutes, strain, and you're done. Freeze in your leftover yogurt containers and don't forget to label them.

Tarragon Fennel Pasta

Tarragon is a great herb to combine with fennel—the two flavors are close and seem to strengthen the other. I'd roast the fennel this week with the tarragon and top a pasta and greens dish with it. Slice your fennel thinly, toss with some olive oil, salt, and chopped tarragon, then roast in a 400° oven until it is nice and tender, and just beginning to brown, maybe 15 minutes or so. Bring your pasta water (salted) to a boil, then melt a half stick of butter in a large pan. Add some chopped shallots and sauté briefly. Add chopped red chard leaves, a couple chopped garlic cloves, the zest of one lemon, a teaspoon of Dijon mustard, more chopped tarragon, and about a half cup of the pasta water and stew slowly until the greens wilt. Cook the pasta then add it to the chard mixture and toss. Check for salt and pepper, plate, then top with the fennel. Parmesan is always welcome, but is not required. A goat triple cream would also taste really good on top of this.

Greek Oregano Feta Salad, from Jonathan

Here's a simple Greek salad idea—and do take the time to ice your red onions. You'll be shocked at how delicious they turn out. Thinly slice half a red onion and put it in a bowl of ice water. Set aside while you make the rest of the salad. A simple vinaigrette goes like this: juice of 1 lemon, a few

Everything in your box and the flowers are organically grown. From Mariquita Farm: basil, shallots, chard, tarragon, oregano. From High Ground: strawberries, romaine, mei quin choy, fennel, rapini greens, radishes. From Thomas Farm: flowers.

splashes quality white wine vinegar, a tablespoon of minced shallot, a bit of chopped oregano, salt and pepper. Mix those ingredients, then whisk in some Greek olive oil until you achieve the balance you prefer. Check again for salt and pepper. Toss your torn or chopped romaine with a little bit of dressing then top the salad with your drained red onion, some kalamata olives, more oregano (whole leaves at this point), some feta (in whole slices or crumbled), and if you can find cucumbers or tomatoes now, add them too. Yummy!

Creamy Fennel Soup, from *Recipeland*

2 cups stock	1 Fennel bulb, about 1 pound
1 Sliver garlic	2 TBS Chopped onions
1 TBS (or more) Lemon juice	1 tsp. Lemon zest, chopped
½ tsp. dried dillweed (or 1½ tsp. fresh)	1 tsp. Ground coriander
1 quart Nonfat yogurt	

Clean and slice the fennel bulb, reserving any greens for garnish. Cook the fennel in the stock with the garlic and shallots until soft. Puree in a blender with the lemon juice and zest, and the spices.

Strain the puree if you wish a smoother texture. Combine well with the yogurt and chill. Serve garnished with chopped fennel greens or chopped cilantro.

Bean Salad Recipe from Michelle Russell

I've been wanting to share how I've been using my Mariquita herbs and purplette onions lately. It's a very simple bean salad that I never tire of, guests have been happy too. First, I get four or so different cans of beans and put them in a bowl. I like to mix colors, so my salad includes garbanzo, black, navy and red. Then I splash balsamic and olive oil over the beans, letting it sit while I wash and chop whatever herbs I have at hand. I like to add at least a half of cup of herbs. My last salad featured parsley and basil. Delicious! Thinly slice the purplette onions and add those too. Stir everything adding salt and pepper to taste. Serve over whatever salad greens you have.

I've also made a tasty version by making the vinaigrette separately, in a blender, with dried tomatoes added. The tomatoes get ground up and the vinaigrette emulsifies nicely.

This salad travels well and makes great leftovers.

Strawberry U-Pick This Saturday

Strawberry U-pick this Saturday, June 13th, from 10am to 4 pm. \$1.50/lb. RSVP to csa@highgroundorganics.com -- just tell us how many flats you expect to pick; it'll give us a rough idea of how much of the field we need to open up.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The strawberries are at our home farm (521 Harkins Slough Rd, Watsonville), NOT at the Redman House Farmstand like last year.

From the South: Take Hwy 1 north to the Harkins Slough Rd./Green Valley Rd. exit. Turn left onto Harkins Slough Rd. Follow this across the freeway, past the new High School, to where the road ends. Take the last farm road/driveway on your left, immediately before the closed gate.

From the North: Take Hwy 1 south to the Hwy 152 Watsonville exit. Turn right at the light onto Green Valley Rd. Follow this across the freeway, past the new High School, to where the road ends. Take the last dirt road on your left, immediately before the closed gate.