



# TWO SMALL FARMS

## Community Supported Agriculture

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### Potatoes, by Andy Griffin

Five girls followed me down the steep cobbled street at a distance, giggling, until one of them got up the nerve to dash past and confront me. "Would you please come to my house for tea?" she asked.

Her friends crowded around. They were thirteen or fourteen years old, dressed alike in the matching skirts and dark sweaters of their school uniform and their hair was tied back in long black, glossy braids. Having gotten over their shyness, they made the quantum leap to boldness and began pelting me with questions en patota; "Are you German? Why are you here? Do you like our town? Have you been to Miami? Are you married?"

"Shut up," barked the boss girl. "He'll answer our questions one by one in a proper interview."

"Why, yes," I replied. "I would be delighted to come to your house for tea."

The girls went into a brief huddle, and arrangements were made. One girl wrote out the address on a piece of note paper, another girl drew a map, and a third girl left to get some cookies. "We're looking forward to visiting with you at 5:30," they said. "Please don't stand us up."

They didn't need to worry. I'd been traveling alone in Bolivia for a month. It was 1991. I'd been a farm worker for years but my first attempt at managing a business had ended in failure a few months before when a hard frost destroyed all my crops and froze my cash flow. Bolivia seemed like a good place to go and look at my life from a distance. I was coming back from a walk in the mountains when the girls stopped me. It was late in the day and windy. I was cold and tired. Hot tea and feminine company sounded nice. These Quechua girls were bright eyed and charming. I was curious to see how they lived.

I scrubbed up at the room where I was staying and found a clean shirt. The town was tiny, so the girl's street wasn't hard to find. I made sure to knock on the door precisely at 5:30, and the leader of the pack welcomed me into her home. I entered a small living room with a sofa against one wall. My young hostess motioned for me to sit. Her friends brought in chairs from the rest of the house and sat around the edge of the room with their backs to the walls. Hanging from the walls was a framed image of La Virgen del Socavón, a clock, and a calendar with a shiny picture of the Swiss Alps. The Alps looked like the painted backdrop for a toy train layout compared to the sullen peaks of the Andean Cordillera that loomed up outside. In the middle of the floor and almost filling the room was an immense pile of freshly dug potatoes.

The girls poured cups of mate de coca and passed around the cookies. After they each spilled a ritual drop of tea onto the floor they got down to business. "Are you German? Why are you here? Do you like our town? Have you been to Miami? Are you married?"

### Need More Strawberries?

The strawberry fields are in full swing, so we'll be offering strawberry flats for sale to your pick-up sites on rotating days. Now's your chance to make jam, freeze berries for smoothies, or make strawberry desserts for a party. The first strawberry delivery day will be Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup>. To order, send your check for \$22 per flat to Two Small Farms, PO Box 2065, Watsonville, CA 95077 and also e-mail Shelley at [csa@twosmallfarms.com](mailto:csa@twosmallfarms.com) so we can record and verify your order. Please be sure to include your pick-up site and subscriber name. The flats will be delivered to your pick-up site with the CSA boxes on June 4<sup>th</sup>.

### This Week

Thyme <sup>MF</sup>

Spinach <sup>MF</sup>

Gold Beets <sup>HG</sup>

Strawberries <sup>HG</sup>

New Potatoes <sup>HG</sup>

Mustard Greens <sup>MF</sup>

Purple Scallions <sup>MF</sup>

Summer Squash <sup>HG</sup>

Radishes OR Mei Quin

Choy <sup>HG</sup>

Flowers: Mixed Bouquet <sup>TF</sup>

"One at a time," I pleaded. So the girls slowed down and introduced themselves. Their homework was to study a foreign country and I looked foreign. I swung at their questions almost as fast as they pitched; "No, I wasn't German. Yes, I liked Bolivia. No, I didn't have children yet, although yes, I was already 32 years old, but no, I hadn't met the right woman yet, and yes, I'd been to Miami, but no, I don't live there, and anyway California is nice too." I even tried to ask the girls a few questions of my own.

"How come you keep the potatoes in the house?" I asked.

"Because they'll freeze outside or someone will steal them," the girl said.

"In California I'm a farmer and I grow potatoes," I said.

"Oh, everyone grows potatoes," another girl said. I suppose she was right, at least in her world.

Her world was harsh. In the Andes the day may dawn icy, but by mid-morning the sun can be hot on your back. After sundown the

temperatures drop again, until your hands and feet are numb. The atmosphere is thin and the air is dry. The sky overhead is deep blue by day, and by night it is jet black and sparkles with majestic drifts of stars. Outer space seems close.

Most people in Bolivia live on the Altiplano, which means "high plains" in Spanish. The Altiplano is high— the altitude ranges from 9,000 feet above sea-level to around 14,000 feet— but the land is nothing close to being as flat as its name implies. The daily extremes of temperatures in the Andes have prompted a number of plants to evolve tuberous growth habits. A tuber is a swollen, underground stem that stores up energy so that if a "killing frost" burns off all the foliage above the ground, the plant still has enough life protected under an insulating mantle of soil to sprout again. The concentrated sugars and starches found in tubers have made a number of them important food crops. The sweet potato, for example, is a tuberous morning glory from Peru that's now cultivated all over the world. Andeans also cultivate an edible tuberous oxalis, called oca. Potatoes are tuberous

nightshades that evolved in the Andes, and they are cultivated there in great profusion.

While we find just few varieties of potatoes on our supermarket shelves, a farmer's market in Bolivia has potatoes of every imaginable shape and color heaped up for display. Little marble sized potatoes are piled up next to long, skinny ones and big round ones in colors ranging from blues, reds and purples to yellows, whites and browns. The potatoes heaped on the living room floor where I attended the tea party were brown.

Bolivian farmers have turned the extreme climatic conditions they must contend with to their advantage, and they use Mother Nature's mood swings to preserve their harvests for the hard times they know lie ahead. Potatoes are cut into pieces and laid out on rocks under the sun to dry, while the farm dogs prowl and bark any marauding crows away. At night, any residual surface moisture that sweats out from the potato chunks is frozen into a spiky beard of ice crystals, which evaporate in the morning sun. After a few days of this treatment, the potato slices are essentially freeze-dried. These black leathery potato chips are called chuño, and can be kept without spoiling almost indefinitely. Chuño is an acquired taste, but when you get used to it, it's earthy and satisfying in stews and broths.

Life isn't easy in the Andes. Half the people I met in Bolivia talked of making their way to Miami. But among traditional people, it is still considered polite to thank the earth goddess, Pachamama, for the blessing of food. Even as the Virgin of the Mines looks down from the wall, the people will spill a drop of their beverage or let a crumb of their food fall to the ground before taking a drink or swallowing a bite. "A taste for Pachamama," they'll murmur, "a taste for me." I heard this phrase so often in Bolivia that I began to notice the people who didn't give thanks for what they had. Spilling drinks and food makes for sticky floors on buses and in public places but in the absence of any SPCA, giving "tastes" to Pachamama also keeps skinny, stray Bolivian dogs alive. Bolivia can be a tough place, but the habit everyday people there have of giving "thanks" lends a hard and austere country a grace that even affluent countries can aspire to.

When the tea party was over my mob of hostesses thanked me profusely for helping them with their homework.

"Encantado," I said. "The pleasure was mine."

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## Recipes and Notes

(also see [www.mariquita.com/recipes](http://www.mariquita.com/recipes))

*How to store this week's box:* Everything into the fridge. Top the beets and cook the greens first—they're best when fresh. Likewise with the radishes, if you get them. Top them and cook the radish greens, too. They're a great cooking green!

*A Potato Note from Andy:* True new potatoes are a rare treat. A new potato is not a small potato but a fresh potato harvested from a green, growing potato plant. A somewhat scuffed, frayed appearance to the potato skin is a frequent consequence of harvesting such tender spuds and is unavoidable because the skin has not yet hardened. If left to mature new potatoes would get a little bigger and the skins would get tougher making for typical potatoes that are easier to harvest and ship. Unfortunately for the potato connoisseur the potato, once cured, always loses some of its tender moisture. New potatoes wilt and must be treated like green vegetables and stored in a bag in the fridge. When I get them as a first treat of the potato crop I never store them at all but eat them promptly. I like to steam them briefly and then roll the hot little potatoes in a

little butter, a pinch of salt, and twist of pepper and voila! Do potatoes get any better? A friend from Idaho said when she was a girl they would eat new potatoes raw. I've tried it—the experience is not unlike jicama.

### Marinated Zucchini, adapted from *Moosewood Restaurant Cooks At Home*

2 to 3 medium zucchinis	2 TBS olive oil
4 garlic cloves, minced or pressed	1 TBS chopped fresh mint, basil or thyme
1 TBS red wine vinegar (or balsamic or lemon juice)	Dash of salt

Wash and dry the zucchini. Cut them diagonally into long, oval-shaped 1/3 inch thick slices. In a large heavy skillet, heat just enough oil to coat the bottom of the skillet. Quickly fry the zucchini slices in a couple of batches until golden speckled on both sides and tender in the center. Drain the fried zucchini slices on paper towels. Lower the heat and sauté the garlic, stirring it constantly until just golden but not brown. Arrange the zucchini on a platter or in a bowl, and sprinkle with the chopped herb of choice, vinegar, salt and garlic. Cover and set aside to serve at room temperature. This may be kept, refrigerated, for a week or so, but bring to room temperature before serving. Serve as an accompaniment to grilled fish or on an antipasto platter, or tucked into a grilled cheese sandwich or omelet.

### Thyme Between Melted Cheese and Toast, *The Kitchen Garden Cookbook* by Thompson

Lightly brush one side of thinnish slices of French bread with olive oil. Brown the oiled tops under a broiler or toaster oven. Sprinkle evenly with fresh leaves of thyme. Cover the bread with thinnish slices of a melting cheese such as jack, Swiss, or Muenster. Sprinkle with a light olive oil and black pepper. Broil until bubbly and serve at once.

### Beet and Avocado Salad/Appetizer, from Chef Andrew Cohen

Cube cooked beets into 1/4" pieces. Toss in a light vinaigrette (go easy with the oil- dressing should be a little sharp) and season with S&P. Place in the bottom of a small (2-3 inch) ring mold. Cube some avocado and place an equal amount on the beets. Toss some micro-greens, sprouts, or fine leaves of bitter greens such as arugula and frisee with just a bare touch of the dressing, and place on top of the avo. Cut some candied ginger into tiny cubes and scatter all around and on the "salad". Remove the mold. At this point my favorite garnish is pistachio oil. Hazelnut or pumpkinseed oil work well for this too. A note about the dressing used; I make a slack dressing using white balsamic vinegar, or a light sherry vinegar. An Orange or Blood Orange dressing works well in this dish as well. Use some juice from an orange with some vinegar in the dressing. You could omit the pistachio or hazelnut oils and add in a pinch of cinnamon to the beets for a different twist.

*Everything in your box and the flowers are organically grown. From Mariquita Farm: thyme, spinach, mustard greens, purple scallions. From High Ground: strawberries, radishes, mei quin choy, new potatoes, summer squash, gold beets. From Thomas Farm: flowers.*