



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

August 18-20, 2010

How 'bout this Weather We're Having?

by Stephen Pedersen

I was amazed the other day when I heard on the radio that, nationwide, this has been the second hottest summer on record. Amazed because, as most of you here along the coast know, this has to go down as one of the coolest summers on record. Day after day here in Watsonville I've woken up in the morning to the sound of drizzle fed drops coming off our roof. And the days when the sun has burned off the fog for some afternoon sunshine have been few and far between.

When people ask me how we are affected by this abnormally cool weather, I usually stammer out a noncommittal answer—something to the effect of “it’s good for some things and not so good for others.” I suppose it is another of the blessings of being a diversified grower—when you have twenty different things out in the field, chances are enough crops will find the prevailing conditions to their liking. It also doesn’t hurt that, being only two miles from the coast, we have largely adapted our program to these cooler conditions. Most of the crops we grow are those that like it cool—lettuce, strawberries, and those in the cabbage family. I learned long ago not to even try growing crops that really need heat like tomatoes, peppers or melons. Of course, if you were to ask Andy, who grows tomatoes in Hollister, or somebody here against the hills in Corralitos, they undoubtedly have a gloomier take on things.

The difference between this year and a “normal” year is the persistence of the fog. We usually get at least a few hours of sun after the fog burns off in the afternoon—that largely hasn’t happened this year. Also unusual is the inland extent of the cooling marine influence.

For us, the main casualty will be the hard (winter) squash, which needs at least some heat for the squash themselves to size up. Although the plants have looked good to date, they are starting to succumb to powdery mildew, a fungal disease that almost always hits at this time of year. In a normal season the squash would have sized up earlier and the disease would have little impact.

On the positive side, crops in the Brassica or cabbage family (cauliflower, broccoli, kale, etc.) love these cool conditions. When they develop more slowly the quality is almost always better and it gives us a much longer window to harvest them. We also have fewer problems with cabbage aphids. By far the

best control of these pests is from a naturally occurring fungal pathogen called bavaria that only thrives under cool, humid conditions.

The strawberries are also happiest when it is cool. Without the stress of excessive heat, the plants stay healthier and bloom at a nice steady pace. The fruit does mature more slowly, but that can allow us to keep up with it better when production spikes.

The one thing I have learned is that, when it comes to the weather, there truly is no “normal”. Last summer, when the temperatures topped 100 for a few days here and people were talking about a permanent pattern change, seems so long ago. I think one of the things that makes farming so interesting and rewarding, if sometimes frustrating, as a profession is that the challenges can be so different every year.

This Week

Tomatoes MF

Strawberries HG

Green Onions HG

Walla Walla Onions MF

Sweet Corn OR Carrots MF

Mixed Summer Squash OR Potatoes HG

Romanesco OR Cabbage HG

Flowers: Mixed Bouquet TF

Recipes

(see www.mariquita.com/recipes for more recipes)

Tomato-Thyme Soup, from Chef Jonathan Miller

(This tomato-thyme soup is simple, and oh so delicious with some quality bread or homemade croutons. It is, however, crucial to peel and seed your tomatoes, or you will end up with some bitterness from the seeds and annoying pieces of peel stuck to the roof of your mouth. To peel your tomatoes, score the bottoms of the tomatoes, drop them into boiling water for the count of 10, then slip the skins off. Cut them into quarters or

eighths over a strainer to catch all the tomato water, then use your fingers to rub out the seeds, dropping them into the strainer. Press down on the seeds to extract all the water into the bowl before discarding, and use that water in the soup. It's more work, but so worth the extra effort!)

olive oil	2 small shallots, minced
leaves from 6-10 branches of thyme, chopped	4-6 tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced
2 carrots, diced	½-¾ cup cream

Sauté the shallots in some olive oil until softened. Add the carrots and sauté slowly until the carrots are softened, about 7 minutes. Do not brown. Add the tomatoes and the thyme with some salt and bring to a low simmer. Add water, but not enough to cover the tomatoes, as they will break down further from here. You want enough to make a soup, but not so much that the flavor is diluted too much. Simmer for about 8 minutes to cook down the tomatoes and to make sure the

carrots are fully cooked. Cool slightly, then blend in a blender until smooth. Return to a pot and stir in the cream, heating through. Taste for seasoning and serve warm with some good, crusty bread.

Potatoes Lyonnaise, from Chef Jonathan Miller

2 lb potatoes, sliced into thin rounds	4 onions, halved and sliced very thinly
olive oil	4 TBL butter
2 TBL parsley	

Blanch the potatoes in salted water for about 2 minutes. Drain and cool. Heat some olive oil in a large skillet that can go in the oven, then add the onions and sauté with some salt and pepper until browned, and very sweet. You don't have to fully caramelize them, but do get them nice and dark. Transfer the potatoes to a bowl, then add the butter to the skillet and melt it. Layer about a third of the potatoes in the pan and season them with salt and pepper. Cover those potatoes with half the onions, then cover those onions with another third of the potatoes, seasoning again with salt and pepper. Top with the remaining onions, then the remaining potatoes, seasoning again. Roast the whole thing in a 400° oven for about 15 minutes, until heated through. Slide the entire gratin onto a serving plate and finish with a dusting of parsley. Serve warm.

Romanesco Compote, from Chef Jonathan Miller

1 head romanesco, cut into small florets	half handful slivered almonds
1 TBL capers, drained and rinsed	2 TBL raisins, soaked in warm water for 30 minutes then drained
2 T parsley, chopped	olive oil
balsamic vinegar	

Very quickly blanch the florets in salted water (I do mine for a count of 5). Drain. In a skillet heat some olive oil and add the romanesco, the almonds, the capers, and the raisins, sautéing over high heat for a few minutes, just until everything is heated through. Add some salt and pepper then the parsley and taste it and correct the seasonings if necessary. Top with a seared scallop and a tiny drizzle of balsamic vinegar.

Summer Squash "Charlottes", from Chef Jonathan Miller

(A 'charlotte' is traditionally a dessert formed in a deep, cylindrical mold. Fruit charlottes are lined with bread and filled with the fruit and baked. This savory charlotte will be lined with summer squash!)

½ oz dry porcinis	2 lb zucchini or summer squash (about 4)
6 oz fresh mushrooms	2 garlic cloves, chopped
1 egg, beaten	2 TBL basil, julienned
1 TBL mint, chopped	

Soak the dry mushrooms in water for 30 minutes. Slice two of the squash into thin, long, ovals. Dice the other two squash. Drain the mushrooms and chop them with the fresh mushrooms. Sauté the sliced squash in batches in olive oil until pale golden, turning and seasoning with salt and pepper. Drain on paper towels after cooking. Add half the garlic to the skillet after you cook the sliced squash and cook for about 30 seconds. Add the diced squash and cook until the soft and the

liquid has cooked off. Transfer to a bowl and fold in the herbs and the egg. Sauté the mushrooms in a bit of oil with some salt and the remaining garlic until cooked through and the liquid has evaporated. Check for seasoning and set aside.

Line the bottoms and sides of 4 ramekins* with the sliced squash, overlapping them slightly if necessary to fit. Spoon a little diced squash into the ramekins, then top with all of the mushrooms. Finish with any remaining diced squash and smooth the top. Put the ramekins in a baking dish, and fill it with enough hot water to come halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Bake at 300 for about 30 minutes until set. Unmold on a serving plate and finish with the following vinaigrette.

*A ramekin is a small (2 oz, 4 oz, 6 oz) cylindrical baking dish, typically used for soufflés, puddings, charlottes, etc.

Tomato Vinaigrette for the Charlottes, from Chef Jonathan Miller

3 tomatoes	3 TBL lemon juice
1 tsp. coriander (ground)	2/3 cup olive oil
2 TBL Basil, julienned	1 TBL mint, chopped

Peel and seed the tomatoes, then dice them. Combine the diced tomatoes with the lemon, coriander, salt and pepper to taste, then whisk in the oil. Fold in the herbs and taste for seasoning. Spoon over and around the finished charlottes. Pretty and delicious!

Coleslaw with Bacon Buttermilk Dressing, adapted from *Perfect Vegetables* by Cooks Illustrated

(Salting and draining the onion with the cabbage helps mellow the harsh raw onion flavors. The bacon will become soft with time, so this salad is best served the day it is made.)

1 lb. red or green cabbage (about ½ a medium head), shredded	1 large yellow or orange carrot, shredded
½ medium onion, sliced thin	salt
6 oz. bacon (about 6 slices), cut into ¼ inch pieces (turkey bacon is fine, or a vegetarian options like facon bacon bits, or maybe smoked almonds)	2 TBL vinegar: cider or champagne
2 TBL olive or vegetable oil	½ cup buttermilk
1 TBL caraway seeds	¼ tsp. dry mustard
2 tsp. sugar	black pepper to taste

Toss cabbage, carrot, onion, and 1 tsp. salt in a colander or large mesh strainer set over a medium bowl. Let stand until the vegetables wilt, at least 1 hour or up to 4 hours. Rinse the vegetables under cold running water (or in a large bowl of ice water if serving immediately). Press, but do not squeeze, to drain; pat dry with paper towels.

Fry the bacon in a medium skillet over med. heat until crisp and brown, about 6 minutes. Transfer the bacon with a slotted spoon or chopsticks to a plate lined with paper towels; discard the fat. Stir together the buttermilk, oil, vinegar, caraway seeds, mustard, and sugar in a medium bowl. Toss cabbage, carrot, onion, and bacon in the dressing. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve.

From Mariquita Farm: tomatoes, corn, walla walla onions, carrots. From High Ground Organics: strawberries, summer squash, potatoes, cabbage, romanesco, green onions. From Thomas Farm: flowers.