



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

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Calçot Onions, by Andy Griffin

Being virtuous would be a tedious affair if it meant nothing more than not doing anything illegal, immoral, fattening, and fun, but the Catalan Spaniards have found a delicious way to celebrate the virtue of thrift with an annual harvest party they call the calçotada. A calçot is an onion, a fresh young onion with a swelling stalk and a green tail. The calçotada is a street party where vast numbers of calçots are grilled outside over hot coals. Crowds of Spaniards fill the streets for the calçotada, pluck the calçots from the heat by their toasted tails and eat them, one after another, all the while drinking copious amounts of wine. “Wait a minute,” you say. “That sounds more like the vice of gluttony than the virtue of thrift” Maybe. But Thrift is modest. She mingles with the crowd at the calçotada, but she doesn’t like to draw attention to herself. In fact, you might not even see thrift at a calçotada until you understand the botany of bulbing onions.

Bulbing onions are typically planted from early fall through early spring. The emergent seedlings are tiny, threadlike plants, hard to see and slow to grow. Onions are greedy plants– they lust for water and fertilizer and they don’t like to share their fields with other plants. In fact, about the only time I ever actually envy chemically dependent farmers is when I pass their fields of young onions and see row after row of their little plants growing in a weed-free field thanks to generous applications of herbicide. (I have to clean my fields by hand and it takes time and costs lots of money.) Anyway, the little onions threads lengthen and fatten over the months into scallions. Finally, after a long season of care, the onions are ready to bulb up. So-called “short day onions” are those breeds of onions that are stimulated by the sun to bulb up when the day length is between 12 and 14 hours. Long-day onions, in contrast, are those varieties that begin to form a bulb when the day length is between 14 and 16 hours.

When the onion crop has matured and the foliage is showing signs of yellowing the onions are lifted from the soil and spread out on the ground with the leaves from one row of onions covering the bulbs of the next, like a thatch, to protect the tender bulbs from sunburn. Then the onions are allowed to cure. The last juices are withdrawn by the onions from their leaves into the bulbs and the onion’s papery husk toughens and dries. After a week or so the onions are ready to be bagged. Crews move through the fields, clipping the stalks and bagging the onions to be hauled off to the packing shed. During the harvest, any onion bulbs that are misshapen, scarred, or sunburned on one side are usually discarded in the

field to be turned under by the tractors. But what would happen to the onion in nature?

First of all, the onion grows for itself, not for us. If left to its own devices, the natural onion bulbs would sit in the soil until the winter rains came. Then, stimulated by the cool temperatures and the moist soil, each bulb would begin to grow again. But instead of sending out roots and merely re-greening, the wild onion bulbs would subdivide within themselves, and send up three or four or five new stalks. Propelled by the stored sugars in the big, round bulb, these the first, new leaves of these second-year scallions are not the slow-growing, hair-like threads of an onion seedling; they’re plump, sweet, and grow like crazy. Then, almost before you know it, this new bundle of fresh scallions morphs into a wad

of hollow seed stalks–the onion “goes to stick,” we say– a flower head appears, seeds form and scatter, and the onion plant dies.

The Spanish peasant culture that gave rise to the calçotada was thrifty to the core– farmers had to be because the life on the land in Spain was hard. Spanish farmers learned to select their very best onions out during the harvest and save them to replant for seed. The good, decent onions they saved to eat themselves or to sell at market. And the onions that were misshapen, scarred, or sunburned on one side; did they leave them on the ground to be turned under by the plow? No way! Farmers were thrifty. They saved the culls and re-planted them, shoving each damaged bulb into the cool, spring soil. The onions responded with surging growth, each bulb producing a fist-full of plump, second year scallions– calçots–

ready for harvest while the emergent onion seedlings of that year’s next cross were no thicker than dog hairs. And because the window of opportunity to enjoy the calçots was so short before the plants themselves would “go to stick,” the farmers overcame their normal frugality and made a party out of eating the onions while they were still good. And calçots are great! Of course you can enjoy them as you would any other green onion, but they are fantastic on the grill. The heat of the coals may char the skin, but it also caramelizes the sugars in the stem until the calçot is sweet and savory, all at once.

As the practice of the calçotada grew in popularity certain “revisions” were made. I’ve even heard of baby leeks being used instead of calçot onions, and I’m sure they taste fine. There is a natural limit to the number of cull onions anyone would have to re-plant for calçots, and besides, some people could probably eat grilled shoelaces if they could wash them down with enough wine. The calçot onions in your harvest box this week came from the cull golden cipollini we grew last year. Provecho!

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This Week

Calçot Onions MF

Strawberries HG

Bok Choy HG

Carrots HG

Rapini MF

Fava Beans MF

Salad Mix or Lettuce HG

Spinach OR Mystery MF

**Flowers: Sweet Williams,
Lilies, and Iris** TF

Tempus fugit! Time to Renew

Are you on our quarterly (9-week) renewal schedule? (The first cycle ends May 14th. If you're not sure, look at the sign-in sheets at your pick up site.) To secure your spot for the 2nd quarter, send in your renewal payment before the May 14th deadline. (9-weeks of veggie shares = \$198; 9-weeks of veggie plus flower shares = \$270) Please make your check payable to Two Small Farms and mail it to PO Box 2065, Watsonville, CA 95077. Thanks!

Recipes and Notes

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

Put everything in fridge. Top your carrots when you get home. Here are 2 fava bean recipes. We like both versions, and which one we do depends on if we have guests or willing children to help in the extra step of Version #2.

Our Favorite Fava Beans, from Julia and Andy

2 lb. favas, taken out of the pods	1-4 cloves of garlic, chopped AND/OR: ½ cup onions, chopped
S & P	olive oil

The simplest version: sauté the favas with the garlic in the heated oil. The shells will come off in the pan, they are a lighter green, and the whole thing can be eaten like that. (Season with S & P.)

Our Other Favorite Fava Beans, from Julia and Andy

Put the light green favas (that have been removed from the pod) into boiling water for 1–2 minutes. Remove immediately, rinse in cold water. Take the outer shell off each fava bean, so that you have just the bright emerald green bean. Then cook just the inner brighter green beans in the heated oil with the garlic for 2–3 minutes, then eat.

La Calçotada, from chef Jonathan Miller

Calçot onions are a Catalan treat. A festival that celebrates their harvest with its own special treatment originated in a town called Valls, north of Tarragona in Catalan.

In Valls, the calçots are roasted over hot coals on wire grills. In fact, they are not even washed before roasting. This cooking takes place an hour or two before eating, as the onions have to be wrapped in paper or plastic to "steam" after roasting. This loosens the skin and allows the interior to fully cook and become super sweet. To eat them, hold the calçot in your left hand by its blackened root base and in your right hand by its inner green leaves at the top. Slip off the blackened part, discard it, and dip the white part in the special sauce I am providing next, called salvitjada. Bite off the calçot where the green part starts and chow it down. Wear clothes that can get messy! Nowadays La Calçotada include lots of wine, lamb chops, roasted chicken, sausage with white beans, allioli, endive salad and dessert, so maybe this should be your Mother's Day party.

The following two methods come from "Catalan Cuisine" by Colman Andrews, who edits the magazine, *Saveur*. The sauces make enough for about a dozen calçots (which wouldn't even be a single serving in Valls!), so adjust the quantities according to how many you get in your box.

Calçot Sauce 1:

1 tomato, whole, unpeeled	12-20 calçots
30 almonds, blanched and roasted	3 garlic cloves, roasted and squeezed out of their skins
¼ tsp. dried spicy red chili, minced	pinch cayenne
½ tsp. red wine vinegar	olive oil
½ tsp. salt	

Roast the tomato around 10 minutes until blackened on all sides on a grill or over hot coals. Set aside and cool. Grill the calçots until very well blackened on all sides. Remove them from the grill and wrap them in paper (newspaper is fine), then wrap them again in a plastic bag. Set aside to steam for 1-2 hours.

Slip the skin off the tomato, cut it in half, and remove the seeds. Chop finely. Crush the almonds in a mortar, then add the garlic, chili, cayenne, salt, and mix together until a thick paste forms. Transfer to a bowl and cover barely with olive oil. Allow to rest a couple minutes, then add the tomato and vinegar. Mix well. Add more oil, salt, and chili if necessary. This should be slightly thick, but still liquidy.

Salvitjada 2:

10 hazelnuts, roasted	10 almonds, blanched and roasted
1 tomato, seeded and finely chopped	1 head garlic, roasted and the pulp squeezed out of the skins
1 parsley sprig, minced	pinch cayenne
½ tsp. salt	1 tsp. red wine vinegar
3 TBS olive oil	

Pulverize the hazelnuts and almonds with a mortar, then transfer to a large bowl. Add the tomato, garlic, and parsley and mash until smooth. Stir in the cayenne, salt, vinegar, and oil. Mix well and allow to stand for at least 2 hours.

Rachel's Bok Choy

1 dozen dry shiitake, soaked in hot water for 30 minutes	2 lb chicken thighs, skinless, cut into halves or thirds through the bone
¼ cup soy sauce	2 TBL mirin
2 TBL cornstarch	1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
½ tsp. salt	3 scallions, sliced into 1 inch long pieces
1 inch ginger, grated	1½ lb bok choy, halved lengthwise and washed thoroughly

Cut off the stems of the shiitakes and discard them with the soaking liquid. Combine the soy sauce, mirin, cornstarch, sesame oil, and salt in a large bowl and mix well. Add the chicken pieces, mushrooms, scallions, and ginger. Marinate at room temperature 30 minutes. Stir occasionally to make sure the chicken marinates evenly.

Put the entire mixture in a pyrex or other type container that can be loaded into a steamer. Steam, covered, until the chicken is cooked through, about 30 minutes. Arrange on a plate and serve with rice.

From Mariquita Farm: fava beans, calçot onions, rapini, spinach, mystery. From High Ground: salad mix, lettuce, bok choy, strawberries, carrots. From Thomas Farm: flowers.