



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

September 8-10, 2010

Know Your Weeds: *Malva neglecta*, by

Andy Griffin

Of course I grow vegetables, but, whether I want to or not, I always grow weeds too, and part of my job as a farmer is to learn all I can about the weeds in my fields. Here's what I've learned about one of my least favorite of weeds, *Malva neglecta*.

Once upon a time marshmallows were made of the sticky juices squeezed from the pulverized roots of marsh mallow, or *Althaea officinalis*. Nowadays marshmallows are made from a viscous protein solution, like gelatin, that's been whipped full of air and sugar, but the old name still sticks. The marsh mallow 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 another mallow, *Malva neglecta*, or cheeseweed. If you try to pull a cheeseweed up it's likely to break off above the ground, leaving the roots behind to re-sprout and leaving your hands slimy. The roots of most mallows are typically mucilaginous when you crush them. There's even a mallow species that scientists have given the name *Bastardia viscosa var. sanctae-crucis*, or, in English, "the viscous Bastardia from Santa Cruz."

I know now that a number of different Mallow species have medicinal properties and are said to be good for soothing coughs and healing wounds. In fact, today's confectionary marshmallow was originally conceived as a palatable delivery system for bitter medicine. One time, when I was traveling in Bolivia, I stayed with a farm family in a lovely hacienda far out in the back country of Tarija Province. When she learned that I was a farmer, the ama de casa was delighted to show me her lovely kitchen garden that took up the entire central courtyard. After lunch, she and her husband took a siesta, but I was restless, so after lying around for a while I decided to do my hostess a favor by pulling up the cheeseweeds I'd seen growing amongst her peppers. How was I to know that they were actually "yerbas curativas," and very difficult to grow in Bolivia? When she woke up from her nap the good woman was dismayed— she said something about a bicho malo that always ate the malva seedlings before the plants could grow. I felt sad. We certainly don't have that problem here. American bugs won't eat *Malva neglecta* and neither will we.

Time to Renew for the Final Quarter of the Season!

The third quarter ends on September 17th. Those of you on our quarterly renewal schedule, please send in your payment now to secure your spot for the fourth and final quarter of the 2010 CSA season. We need to receive your check by September 17th in order to extend your subscription in our system and ensure you are on the schedule to get your fall vegetables. The 2010 CSA season ends November 17-19. Please make your check (9 weeks of veggies=\$198, 9 weeks of veggies and flowers=\$270) payable to Two Small Farms and mail it to: P.O. Box 2065, Watsonville, CA 95077.

This Week

Lettuce ^{HG}

Gold Chard ^{MF}

Strawberries ^{HG}

Carola and/or Desiree

Potatoes ^{HG}

Early Girl Tomatoes OR

Summer Squash ^{MF}

Italian Parsley ^{MF}

Mei Quin Choi ^{HG}

Mystery ^{MF}

Flowers: Mixed Bouquet ^{TF}

Meanwhile the drug companies get rich selling cough syrup and I pay farm workers to kill malva. It's too bad I can't make artisanal, medicinal "field mallows" for you all to roast at home, but the FDA would probably frown on that.

So why, you ask, is *Malva neglecta* called "cheeseweed" if 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 to the ground like rain when the plant matures and they remain vital in the soil for years. On bad days I think I can remember hearing a story 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. But only the *Malva neglecta*

sprouted. This tale could just be my paranoia talking, though. So what can a farmer like me do to rid a plot of ground of mallow without resorting to powerful toxic chemicals that also 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 fourteen days to germinate, and onions can take ten. The first two leaves, or cotyledons, of a nascent malva plant look like a pair of tiny green valentines. 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. There is no need to stand over the

seedlings and incinerate them. Bigger organic farms use tractor mounted torches and speed down the field. You can think of this organic flame weeding technique as “roasting field mallows” if you want. Burning mallows down the rows is never as fun as roasting marshmallows over the coals, but one thing’s for sure; no matter how much *Malva neglecta* we’re able to kill there are always “s’more” where they came from!

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Recipes and Notes

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

For the mystery we continue to rotate which routes receive padron peppers. Besides padron peppers, the mystery could be eggplant or honeydew melon. No spicy peppers planned for the shares this week. The padron peppers are mostly not spicy, and they are delicious just sautéed until a little browned, salted, and eaten whole. Maybe one in 15 or 20 might have some spicy heat.

What I would do with my CSA share this week by CSA host, Roxanne C.: For the **chard**, this very simple dolma is from Sunset magazine many years ago: cut stems out of chard leaf in a V shape and chop into a medium size. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil and blanch stems until soft, 1 or 2 minutes, scoop out and set aside. Then put leaves in boiling water until wilted about 30–45 seconds. Scoop out and drain, lying them flat. Make a vinaigrette with 2 parts olive oil to 1 part lemon juice. 1 lemon should be enough. Season with S&P.

Put chopped stems in vinaigrette to coat them. Divide stems according to number of leaves. Put a spoonful at bottom third of chard leaves, being careful to overlap at bottom, fold up, then pull sides over stems and continue to roll up burrito style. Lay on a plate in 1 or 2 layers and pour any remaining vinaigrette over all. If needed, sprinkle a little more olive oil over them and garnish with thin lemon slices to use at serving time. These will keep several hours at room temp. OK, if this sounds like too much work, just chop it all up, put on a platter and dress with vinaigrette, still at room temp.

Summer **tomatoes** and a big bunch of flat **parsley** means tabbouli or panzanella (Italian Bread Salad). Basic versions can be a great way to use bits of leftover meat or vegetables, spiked with olives or cheese.

Mei Quin Choi -- grill on BBQ or on a hot, lightly oiled skillet. Prep: Cut tough part of stem off and soak in sink of cool water. When plumped, slice in half from bottom towards up about 2 inches until you can pull the 2 halves apart without tearing leaves. This allows you to see if any grit remains to swish out. (I clean lettuce this way, too.) Drain the excess water out by just leaning them on the side of the sink for a few minutes.

To cook: Rub a little oil on your palms, and apply to each half by rubbing lightly around each piece, place on hot pan or grill, turning over as leaves start to wilt and stems look a little translucent and slightly caramelized. Put on a plate, season with a sprinkle of soy sauce (I like Bragg's) and sesame seeds (toasted, if you like). Serve hot or room temp.

Melons: we just eat but the age old combos of something salty (like prosciutto) or a scoop of vanilla ice cream are pretty hard to beat. The tomato, melon, cucumber salad is a winner in hot weather. Just about any light vinaigrette and leafy, fragrant herb works here, too.

Upcoming Events

Cooking Class with Chef Jonathan Miller, Saturday, September 25th, 10 AM to 2 PM in Watsonville: how to make the most of your farm share, highlighting the flavors of late summer/early fall, including peppers, greens, carrots, beets, etc. Email Shelley (csa@twosmallfarms.com) to sign up. Cost: \$55/person (Net proceeds will be donated to the Freedom School Garden.)

Fall Harvest Festival and Pumpkin Patch, Saturday October 9th from 10 AM to 4 PM at High Ground Organics. pumpkins, made-to-order holiday wreaths, strawberry picking, petting zoo, pony rides, hay rides, farm arts and crafts for kids, live music, and yummy organic food prepared under the direction of chef Andrew Cohen. Cost \$10 adult/\$5 child/ 3 and under free. Food, pumpkin, and produce purchases extra. Proceeds go to Linscott Charter School in Watsonville.

Wilted Chard Salad, from Chef Jonathan Miller

1 bunch chard, stems reserved for another use,	1 preserved lemon, chopped (rind only)
2 tsp. currants	2 white, lemon cured anchovies
2 TBS feta, crumbled	2 tsp. pine nuts, toasted
leaves from 2 thyme branches, chopped	needles from 1 small rosemary branch, chopped
1 TBS breadcrumbs	olive oil
lemon juice	

Bring a pot of water to a boil and boil the chard for about 15 seconds. Drain and cool in an ice water bath. Drain again and dry. Toss the remaining ingredients together, then toss with the greens, finishing with a bit of olive oil and lemon juice.

Summer Squash with Coconut Milk

5 quarter slices fresh ginger, peeled	1 garlic clove, peeled
1 Serrano pepper	½ cup curry leaves, fresh
½ cup cilantro, chopped	1 TBS shredded coconut
2 TBS grapeseed oil	1 TBS ground coriander
¼ tsp. ground turmeric	Salt
6-8 summer squash, cut into ¾ inch rounds	1 cup coconut milk

In a food processor, process the ginger, garlic, serrano, curry leaves, cilantro, and coconut until relatively smooth. Add a touch of water if necessary.

Heat the oil in a saucepan and add the puree and cook to golden, about 5 minutes. Add the coriander, turmeric, a little salt, and the squash. Cook a few more minutes, then add the coconut milk. Cover, reduce the heat, and cook until the squash is soft, at least another 5-7 minutes. Serve warm with a bit more cilantro on top.

From Mariquita Farm: chard, Italian parsley, tomatoes, summer squash, mystery (padron peppers, melon, eggplant). From High Ground Organics: strawberries, lettuce, potatoes, mei quin choi. From Thomas Farm: flowers.