

Two Small Farms Newsletter

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In your box this week: Strawberries, Salad Mix, Scallions, Radishes, Erbette Chard, Thyme, Basil, Arugula. Wednesday boxes: Summer Squash. Thursday boxes: Cucumbers

Preliminary Vegetable Notes

All items except berries and basil should be stored in a plastic bag in the fridge. Set basil in a jar of water, just like a flower bouquet, and leave on the counter. It tends to turn black if it gets too cold, so we don't recommend refrigeration. Remove the radish tops and use as you would chard, in a soup or sauté.

To Eat First: Strawberries and radish greens. To eat second (within 1-5 days) arugula, salad mix, summer squash, cucumbers, radishes, scallions, chard, thyme, basil.

Why Every Cook Needs a Good Sharp Knife by Bruce Cole.

Bruce is a writer in San Francisco and has a great food website called SauteWednesday.com

Sharp knives are a cook's most important tool. Every prep task that includes the use of a knife is ultimately easier (and safer) with a sharp one. The sad fact is though; most home cooks have a wooden block full of dull knives. Sure, they may cut through a tough-skinned squash, dice an onion, and even slice through a tomato or two without spurting juice all over your apron, but seriously so-sharp-you-could-shave-with-them, they are not.

Your first question is probably, "why do my knives need to be *that* sharp when they already seem to do just fine?" Well, when it comes to knives, "just fine", just doesn't cut it. A finely honed and razor sharp knife lets you make painstakingly precise slices. Not

exactly what you need for every recipe you cook, but as any chef will tell you, perfectly cut ingredients triumph over those that are sloppily hacked every time. Dicing an onion for a risotto? A small diamond shaped dice will melt into the rice, adding a subtle but complex layer of flavor. Big chunks of unevenly cut onion stick out in a risotto like the seeds in a watermelon.

Judy Rodgers, chef of the Zuni Café in San Francisco has this to say about knives: "A sharp knife glides through food with little pressure...a dull knife forces you to exert pressure; it doesn't get purchase on what you are cutting and is apt to slip from the mark...a dull knife tends to smash rather than slice its way through ingredients, damaging them more than necessary, and leaving them ripe for texture and flavor degeneration."

(*The Zuni Café Cookbook*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).

So just how sharp/dull are your knives? Try this simple test. Take 6 big fresh basil leaves and gently roll them up like a cigar. Grab your favorite chef's knife, and holding the little basil stogie perpendicular to the blade, slice off thin chiffonade strips about 1/8" wide.

Basil leaves are a delicate sort and don't hold up to much abuse, so the chances are pretty good that the strips you've just cut are quickly losing their vibrant green color and slowly turning black on the edges. While your knife has seemingly managed to cut right through the basil leaves, things look a whole lot different on the molecular level where it really counts. If you examined your knife blade under magnification, you'd find a steel edge composed of thousands of little micro-teeth. When all of these teeth are perfectly aligned, the cutting edge is razor sharp. When the teeth are off-kilter though, the blade is dull, it ends up sawing its way through the cell membranes of food, leaving ragged edges in its wake that immediately begin to oxidize and discolor. Not good, and not very appetizing, especially if you were

planning on garnishing a dish with your now black basil. But how do you get your knives sharp enough so they won't destroy a simple herb chiffonade?

The easiest, no-hassle way is to find a professional knife sharpening service.. Drop off or send them *just one* of your knives. When you get it back, closely examine the cutting edge just to make sure it's straight and doesn't have any hollows or chips. No sense giving them all of your knives up front if they are going to potentially ruin them – and believe me – I've heard horror stories of knives demolished by a supposedly professional sharpening service. Try another sharpness test. Grab the corner of a newspaper, and right next to where your finger has a grip on the page, draw your knife blade down and back towards you. If it's razor sharp it should cut through the page all the way down the length of the blade, with out snagging. If it snags at all, that section of your blade isn't as sharp as it should be. Either send it back, or find a new sharpening service. If all goes well, then you can feel confident giving them the rest of your knives.

A note on butchers: most meat counters and butchers offer inexpensive knife sharpening, but I would caution against it. Butchers use a completely different cutting edge than a home cook. It is a very thin edge designed for slicing through meats, and consequently, it's not meant for the kind of cutting and slicing you're most likely to do in a kitchen.

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Recipes

Arugula recipes

Arugula is an herb, vegetable or salad green, depending on the recipe. Try it torn up as a

salad or on it's own with chopped apples & blue cheese, or just add to a lettuce salad for a zip. Or as a lettuce-replacement on a sandwich. It can also replace spinach in many cooked spinach recipes.

Pasta Arugula

from Rosemary Webb

½ to 1 bunch of chopped arugula (one inch sizes)
¾ pound of pasta (I used tiny shells)
Juice of one half lemon
2 tablespoons of dry white wine
2 cloves of finely minced garlic
3 teaspoons of olive oil
1/8 to 1/4 cup of chicken broth or other mild broth

Cook pasta and toss with raw arugula, while the pasta is cooking place the rest of the ingredients in a glass bowl and heat for 1 minute in the microwave. toss everything at once. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

Basil recipes:

ROASTED-GARLIC BASIL SAUCE

4 large garlic cloves
1 medium zucchini
¾ cup packed fresh basil leaves
¼ cup packed fresh flat-leafed parsley leaves
½ cup water
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

Preheat oven to 425°F. Wrap garlic cloves tightly in foil. Cut zucchini into 1/4-inch-thick slices and season with salt and pepper. Put foil-wrapped garlic and zucchini on a baking sheet and roast in middle of oven until garlic is tender and zucchini is pale golden, about 15 minutes. Unwrap garlic and cool. Have ready a bowl of ice water. In a saucepan of boiling water blanch basil and parsley 10 seconds and drain in a sieve. Refresh herbs in ice water to stop cooking

and drain in sieve. Sauce ingredients may be prepared up to this point 1 day ahead and kept separately, covered and chilled. In a blender blend garlic, zucchini, herbs, water, and lemon juice until smooth, about 1 minute, and season with salt and pepper. Makes about 3/4 cup. Each 3 tablespoon serving about 14 calories and 0 grams fat. Gourmet September 1997

PESTO

Adapted From Cooks Illustrated 1996
Makes 3/4 cup

Basil usually darkens in homemade pesto, but you can boost the green color a little by adding the optional parsley. For sharper flavor, substitute one tablespoon finely grated pecorino Romano cheese for one tablespoon of the Parmesan. This recipe, thinned with two or three tablespoons of pasta cooking water, is sufficient to dress a pound of pasta.

1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted (or substitute almonds or walnuts)
3 medium garlic cloves, threaded on a skewer
2 cups packed fresh basil leaves, rinsed thoroughly
2 tablespoons fresh flat Italian parsley leaves (optional, or try adding some arugula instead!)
7 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Pinch salt
1/4 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

1. Toast nuts in small heavy skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently, until just golden and fragrant, 4 to 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, bring small saucepan of water to boil. Lower skewered garlic into water; boil until garlic is partially blanched, about 45 seconds. Immediately run cold water over garlic to stop the cooking. Remove from skewer; peel and mince.

3. Place basil and parsley in heavy-duty, quart-size, zipper-lock bag; pound with flat side of meat pounder until all leaves are bruised.

4. Place all ingredients except cheese(s) in bowl of food processor fitted with steel blade; process until smooth, stopping as necessary to scrape down bowl with flexible spatula.

5. Transfer mixture to small bowl, stir in cheese(s), adjust salt, and serve. (Can be covered with a sheet of plastic wrap placed directly over the surface or filmed with oil and refrigerated up to 5 days.)

SMASHED POTATOES WITH PESTO

Boil in salted water to cover until very tender:

3 lbs. potatoes

Drain well and return to the pan. Place back on the burner and shake to dry the potatoes. Peel all or half of the potatoes, then smash with a large spoon or fork, blending in:

1/2 cup milk
1 tbsp. butter

Add:

1/2 cup pesto sauce
salt and pepper, to taste

Serve hot. The potatoes can be placed in an oiled baking dish and reheated in a 375 degree oven just before serving. *Joy of Cooking*, Rombauer, et al.

Bean Salad Recipe from Michelle Russell

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 green or other sweet onions and add those too. Stir everything adding salt and pepper to taste. Serve over whatever salad greens you have. That's it. 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.

Thyme recipes:

Thyme Between Melted Cheese and Toast

From *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.

POTATO AND GARLIC SOUP WITH HERBS

2 tablespoons olive oil (preferably extra-virgin)
1 cup chopped onion
4 cups canned chicken or vegetable broth
2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
6 large garlic cloves, peeled
1 bay leaf
1/4 cup minced green onions
2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme or

Heat olive oil in heavy large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, saute until golden, about 10 minutes. Add broth, potatoes, garlic and bay leaf; bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover and simmer until

potatoes are very tender, about 20 minutes. Cool slightly. Discard bay leaf. Coarsely puree soup in blender 1 cup at a time, about 20 seconds per batch (do not overprocess). Return soup to same saucepan. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Simmer until heated through. Ladle soup into bowls. Sprinkle with chives and thyme and serve.

Serves 4.
Bon Appetit
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Erbette Chard recipes:

CHARD CATALAN STYLE

1 lb. Bunch chard, stems removed, leaves blanched for 10-15 seconds in boiling water
2 tbsp. olive oil
1 lg. Clove garlic, sliced
1/3 cup dark or golden raisins
1/3 cup pine nuts
Salt and freshly milled pepper

Coarsely chop the cooked spinach. Warm the oil with the garlic in a wide skillet over medium heat. When the garlic is golden, remove it. Add the raisins and pine nuts and cook until the raisins are plumped and the pine nuts are golden. Add the greens and cook until they're heated through. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone, Deborah Madison

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