

Two Small Farms Newsletter
Issue Number 327 July 27, 2005

In your box this week: New (freshly dug) Potatoes, Cabbage, Thyme, Garlic, Salad Mix, either Strawberries OR Artichokes; Wednesday Boxes: Broccoli and Lemon Cucumbers; Thursday Boxes: Summer Squash and Armenian Cucumbers

Preliminary Vegetable Notes:

Most items, including the potatoes, should be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. The garlic can be stored just on your counter. The berries, if you receive them, should be eaten within a day or so and stored on your counter out of the plastic bag.

To eat first: Strawberries, salad mix, broccoli. To eat second (within five days): artichokes, summer squash, cucumbers, thyme, potatoes, cabbage. To eat within a couple weeks: garlic

A note about strawberries: the plants have been putting on a lot of flowers so we expect to regularly have them in the boxes during August and into September.

Potato Class by Andy

One day six years ago when my son, Graydon, was four years old he came strolling into the kitchen and said, "I'm hungry, Poppa. Make me lunch, make it crunchy, and make it fast!" I had to laugh at that, but the truth is that conversations with Graydon about food usually make me sad. It's my fate, or perhaps my fault, to be an organic vegetable farmer whose oldest child wants to only eat processed crap that's been packaged by major corporations. I've been hoping that this is just a phase and that soon I'd see him try something new without a bad face or a fight, and finally I see positive changes. Maybe his impoverished taste has been just a phase he's had to grow through, but I think potato class has been helpful too.

Julia and I started home schooling our kids this year. She has a teaching credential and the discipline to attend to the daily routine of instruction in the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, but I take time with my children when I can. I'd always hoped that growing up on a farm and seeing where their food came from would help my kids appreciate their meals, but while they were still attending school it began to enter my mind that Graydon's familiarity with food was actually fostering contempt; after all, he saw where our food came from—it comes out of the dirt—and his peers at school got to unwrap their Lunchables from clean, shiny plastic packages. I found myself feeling angry about the messages that the school environment was sending about food and I felt impotent to change the situation.

When Julia decided she wanted to start home schooling the kids I was excited. If I get the kind of time to teach my child about food, I asked myself, can I score points against corporate giants who manipulate peer pressure on the school playground with their clever advertisements and their entertainment tie-ins? I decided I'd launch my counter-offensive with a white potato and see if I couldn't widen the war into green vegetables.

At lunch time on the first day of the home schooling regimen Graydon said he was hungry.

"What would you like to eat?", I asked. The refrigerator was full of food, but the food was all full of vitamins and nutrients with nary a cartoon character in sight to lent artificial flavor or action figure appeal.

Fried potatoes, he finally said.

So I said, "Great. We'll have potatoes after we've grown them," and I fixed him a grilled cheese sandwich. After lunch I showed him the seed potato catalogue I get from Ronniger's Farm so he could see all the varieties that are available, and I ordered several kinds, including Irish Cobbler, Viking Purple, German Butterball, and Russian Fingerlings. Now we wait, I said, because the potato farmer can't ship them to us until the weather warms up or

they will freeze in transit.

When the potatoes came I showed them to him.

Your job, I said, is to open each bag, take out the potatoes, and put them in racks on the ground in the sun so that they turn green. This process is called chitting and it helps the potato sprout. Graydon emptied the bags and racked up 500 pounds of potatoes. Now we wait, I said.

When the potatoes had greened and sprouted I showed him how a potato is really an enlarged stem, not a root. Because the potato eyes had sprouted and the tubers were green this was not such a hard concept to understand. Your job, I said, is to cut each potato in half so that each piece has at least two strong buds, but the smaller potatoes can remain whole. And while he cut the tubers I built a fire. When he was done cutting and the ashes were cool I told him to roll the potatoes in the ashes and I explained that this would help dessicate the wound and protect the potato slice from being infected with disease. Now we wait, I said.

While the potato pieces healed I worked up planting bed with the tractor. Then I hauled the potatoes to the garden and showed him how to plant them by dropping them in the soil about four inches deep. As he started planting I helped him and I explained how we wouldn't need to even irrigate the potatoes if they were cultivated correctly. They have their own water and sugar in their flesh to grow leaves to the surface. When he seemed to have the planting down I left him to it on his own. It took him several days, working intermittently, and when he was almost done his friend, Eric Baur, the son of our seed salesman, showed up and helped him finish. Now we wait, I said.

As the potatoes started to sprout from the ground I showed Graydon how to rake the soil up around the stems. Every potato that develops grows from above the tuber you planted, so if you don't hill the potatoes you'll get no crop. I showed him how to weed by pulling up the mustards. If you don't kill the mustards they'll take all the water and

nutrients. Graydon wasn't thrilled to weed because it's hard work.

Why don't I wait, he asked, until it's cooler.

If you wait, I countered, you'll be too preoccupied playing with your sister in the evening and before you know it you'll lose your crop. Some things can't wait. So in the mornings while it was still cool Graydon weeded his potatoes.

When can we dig the potatoes?, Graydon wanted to know.

When the plants are ready, I answered, and I showed him how to look out for the flowers which announce that the plants are setting tubers. We dug a few plants up and I showed him the tiny pea sized tubers just forming on long umbilical cords off of the plant. We gotta wait, I said.

Then, just last week, while I was in the fields in Hollister, Graydon called me on the cell phone and he sounded distraught. Poppa, he said, I think the gophers got all the potatoes. They're all dead!

No, I replied. I think we're done waiting. The potatoes are mature. The tubers have pulled the last nutrients out of the foliage and they're toughening their skins. Take your shovel down there and dig. He dug up a big bucket of Irish Cobbler potatoes and took them as a present to his grandmother. I felt so good when she called me to tell me how proud he was of his harvest. But she laughed when she told me that he said she hadn't cooked them right, that they weren't crunchy the way Poppa makes them.

Graydon says you have to cook them twice, she told me. What's that all about?

So I explained. For the crunchiest fried potatoes boil the potatoes first until they're about three quarters cooked through, then let them cool. Cut the potatoes into thick slices and fry them in olive oil on fairly high heat. Because the potatoes are already cooked the frying can be

done quickly and the high heat makes for maximum crunchiness. The olive oil gives a nice golden color that's very appetizing. A little sea salt and va-va-voom!

Now I'm working with Graydon on salad class. I'm making progress with Romaine lettuce, celery, and cucumbers. I feel encouraged because I've been in the ring with Ronald Macdonald in a grudge fight over fried potatoes, and I beat the fright wig off that corporate clown. All I can say is that any cartoon character that wants to hustle those nasty little carrot plugs that smell like chlorine to my kids better watch out because I'm on the slow food warpath.

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Graydon in his potato class in early June

What to do with this week's box - Chef Andrew Cohen

For the yellow fleshed, red-skinned potatoes, I would roast them. Rinse off and pat dry so as not to strip the skin. Slice in half so the widest face will be exposed. Toss in olive or grapeseed oil, sprinkle with coarse salt and fresh cracked pepper and put into a baking pan that has been rubbed with a peeled garlic clove and lightly oiled (the garlic will add flavor without burning and the oil makes clean-up easier). Cover tightly with foil and bake in pre-heated 450F. oven in the upper half for 30 minutes. Remove foil and check to see that the potatoes are soft (a thin knife blade should slide in easily). If they are, return to oven to brown for 15 minutes or so. If not softened, recover and cook another 10-15 minutes, then proceed as above. Serve hot or room temp. These potatoes have a wonderful nutty (think hazelnut) flavor with a fluffy/creamy texture inside.

The white potatoes are excellent steamed or boiled, then served with just butter or oil, or garnished with a scattering of mixed herbs such as thyme and savory or chives and parsley. There is always potato salad. I like mine with a

vinaigrette instead of mayo (at least right now). Make a vinaigrette with cider vinegar or white wine vinegar, shallots, salt and pepper, and a light oil. Cut spuds into bite-sized pieces and steam the potatoes until done. Then, while still hot, dress them with the vinaigrette, tossing carefully to not break them. Allow to cool or refrigerate before serving. Diced celery, bits of bacon, hard-boiled egg, all make good additions to the salad.

For the all-red potatoes, cut into bite-sized pieces and steam until just done, then toss into a hot skillet with a mixture of oil and butter (the oil "tempers" the butter and helps prevent burning, the butter is for flavor) and saute to crisp the potatoes. You can also do this under the broiler if you need the space and remember they are in there. This yields a crispy outside and a light fluffy interior with a sweet and nutty flavor.

Cucumbers, Armenian (Snake Melon) and Lemon. I find these to be less watery than their green relatives, and so give them a different treatment at times.

A Mediterranean style salad; Cut cukes into 1/2" cubes, do the same with a cheese such as Myzithra, Feta, or a firmer goat's cheese. Halve tomatoes and use the tip of your finger to knock out the seeds. Cut the same size as the rest of the ingredients. Vigorously rub a bowl with a garlic clove, then toss ingredients into the bowl. Sprinkle with tiny fresh oregano leaves (if available) or freshly minced oregano. Sprinkle with coarse salt and fresh ground pepper and allow to stand. The tomatoes will give off some juice- this is the "vinegar", then drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and toss gently. The salad is ready to serve. This could be made more substantial with the addition of cooked bulgur (cracked wheat) or wheat berries. Diced red onion that has been lightly salted then well rinsed would be a good addition.

For something different, split the Armenian cucumber along the length and use the tip of a

teaspoon to get the seeds out. Slice into 1/4" or just smaller slices and saute gently over medium low heat in a touch of oil. Salt sparingly just before service and sprinkle with fresh dill and some lemon juice (Meyer lemon would be great).

Thyme; one of my favorite herbs that finds its way into just about everything. Simple roast chicken with minced thyme and S&P. I throw sprigs of it into the pan with the roast potatoes above. A natural with beef, lamb, and mushrooms. Braises of meat and Rhone style wines should have thyme and garlic.

Chicken in red wine, olives, and thyme. Put out up chicken (on the bone), chopped onion, a few peeled garlic cloves, and some chopped thyme in an oven proof pan that can be tightly covered. Pour in red wine such as a syrah to come half-way up the chicken, then scatter a handful of black (not Mission from the can) olives over the dish and sort of push them into the wine. Fresh pepper goes next. Heat the dish until the wine comes to the boil. If this was done in a Pyrex or other non-flameproof dish, heat the wine in a pan and pour in. Cover the dish tightly and put into a 450F. oven for 30 minutes. Pull the dish out, uncover and turn the chicken over. Return to the oven and cook until the chicken browns. Remove from the oven and strain the wine off. Reserve the meat and olives and keep warm. Skim the fat from the wine and reduce over high heat to concentrate the flavors. If you want to make a thicker sauce, reduce further and thicken anyway you like- cornstarch slurry, butter mount, etc.

When I have a sore throat or congestion I sometimes make a tea with thyme and sip it throughout the day. It helps dry out the head and astringes the throat.

Tomatoes? Someone say tomatoes? I do a different version of Insalata Caprese- tomato, mozzarella, and basil salad. Cut tomatoes in half (4 medium) horizontally and use your fingertip to seed it. Cut into 1/2" cubes and put

into a non-reactive bowl. Sprinkle with a healthy pinch of coarse salt and drizzle extra virgin olive oil lightly over them. Cut an 8 oz. ball of fresh mozzarella into the same size and put in to different bowl. This gets EVOO and some fresh ground black pepper. Allow to sit five to ten minutes. Just before serving, stack a dozen tender basil leaves up and shred as finely as you can (use your sharpest knife). Mix the cheese into the tomatoes and gently toss to combine. Sprinkle 3/4s of the basil in and mix around. Put onto separate plates, and garnish with the remaining basil shreds, a few grains of salt (I like Maldon salt best for this- big flakes that add a great contrast to the other ing.s), and thin slices of toasted rustic bread that has been rubbed with a clove of garlic right out of the toaster .

Gratin of summer squash and tomatoes; rub a casserole with a garlic clove, and allow to dry. Slice squash into 3/8" to 1/2" slices. Do the same to some tomatoes. Put in a row of squash, then tomatoes, overlapping 3/4 of the veg below. When the dish is filled, drizzle olive oil (or use a basting brush for better coverage and using less oil) over the ingredient, hit with S&P and some herbs. Bake at 450F. for approx. 1 hour. The gratin should be cooked through and beginning to caramelize.

You could sprinkle bread crumbs that have been tossed with oil on the dish about ten minutes before it's done to brown the crumbs. You can add cheese, or line the bottom of the dish with sauteed onions and garlic. This dish is good hot as well as room temperature. I have been known to load some of this gratin onto toasted Francese rolls with a slice of cheese like provolone and prosciutto, with arugula.

About artichokes- I cover them with a dish towel to help keep them submerged while cooking. If you are having wine with the meal the artichokes are a part of, putting some of that wine into the cooking water will help bridge the two. Artichokes are notorious for being difficult to pair with wine. I also add garlic and bay

leaves to the water.

Recipes

MASTER RECIPE FOR STEAMED WHOLE ARTICHOKE

adapted from Cooks Illustrated Serves 4

A steaming apparatus, such as a collapsible basket or bamboo rack, is helpful but not necessary for whole artichokes. Simply make use of the artichoke's tips and trimmings as a rack. Artichokes can be served warm with melted butter or at room temperature with one of the vinaigrettes that follow.

12 baby artichokes, rinsed and trimmed

Salt

1. Place steaming apparatus (optional) in large nonreactive pot with tight-fitting lid; bring 1 inch of water to boil.

2. Place artichokes, stem end up, in steaming apparatus or in water. Sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon salt; cover and steam over medium-high heat until tender, about 25 minutes for the babies; outer leaves should pull away easily and the stem end should be thoroughly tender. 3. Gently remove artichokes with tongs. Serve immediately or cool, stem end up, to room temperature. (Can be covered and refrigerated overnight; bring to room temperature before serving.)

ANDY'S FAVORITE CABBAGE

sliced green cabbage

sliced onion (red, green or white)

olive oil

salt

pepper

white wine

Sauté the onion and cabbage in oil, then add wine, salt and pepper. This is a magnificent dish.

Cabbage, Carrots, and Onions with Sesame

(Still Life with Menu by Mollie Katzen)

6T sesame seeds

3/4t salt

3T toasted sesame oil

1 bunch green onions

1 large carrot thinly sliced

1 head of green cabbage coarsely chopped

Combine the sesame seeds and salt in a blender. Grind until they achieve the consistency of coarse meal. This is called gomasio or sesame salt. Set aside. Heat a medium-sized wok or large deep skillet. Add the sesame oil and the onions. Stir-fry over med-high heat for a couple of minutes. Add about a tablespoon of the gomasio. Keep stir-frying until the onions are soft and translucent (5-8 minutes). Add carrots and the cabbage, and sprinkle in about half the remaining gomasio. Keep stir-frying until everything is tender (another 10-15 minutes). Sprinkle in the remaining gomasio, and serve. Serves 4

Red Cabbage and Onions, Gourmet, December 2002

1 teaspoon olive oil

1 1/2 lb red cabbage, cored, cut into 2-inch pieces, and layers separated

1/2 lb red onions, cut into 1-inch pieces and layers separated

2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh thyme

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Heat oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking, then sauté cabbage, onions, thyme, salt, and pepper, stirring, 3 minutes. Cover skillet and reduce heat to moderate, then cook, stirring occasionally, until cabbage is tender, about 12 minutes more.

Makes 4 servings.

Lemon cucumbers called 'lemon' cucumbers because of their shape and color. They taste like a 'regular' cucumber, and can be used in nearly all the same ways. An Armenian Cucumber is

neither Armenian nor a true cucumber. It's originally from North Africa and is a true melon that tastes, smells and is used like a real cucumber. Eat it with the skin on!

In-a-Pinch Cucumber Salad

adapted from *Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone*
by Deborah Madison

1 long or two short Armenian cucumbers or 3-4
lemon cukes
salt and freshly milled white pepper
2 to 3 tsp. extra virgin olive oil
champagne vinegar or fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. fresh dill or parsley, chopped

Thinly slice cucumbers. Toss the cucumbers with a few pinches salt, pepper to taste, and enough oil to coat lightly. Add a few drops vinegar and the herb of your choice. Serves 4.

Rumpledethumps (also known as Colcannon) (Sundays At Moosewood Restaurant)

2-2 1/2 pounds potatoes
2 1/2 cups chopped cabbage
2 leeks, washed and chopped
2 1/2 cups coarsely chopped broccoli
6 T butter
1/4 t mace
salt and pepper to taste
3/4 cup milk
1 1/2 cups grated cheddar cheese

Peel the potatoes, cut them into chunks, and boil them in salted water for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, steam the cabbage, leeks, and broccoli. Melt 2T of the butter and stir in the mace. Mix the seasoned butter and salt and pepper to taste into the steamed vegetables. Drain the potatoes and mash with 2T butter, milk and salt and pepper to taste. Stir in the seasoned veggies and mix evenly. Spread in an oiled 13X9 inch baking pan. Melt the remaining 2T butter and drizzle it over the potato mixture. Sprinkle the top with the grated cheese. Place under the broiler for 3-4 minutes or until the cheese is browned and bubbly. Serves 6

SKILLET-CRUSTED POTATOES, Gourmet, June 1997

These potatoes are at their best when browned just before serving.

2 1/2 pounds small boiling potatoes
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme leaves

In a large saucepan cover potatoes with salted cold water by 1 inch and simmer potatoes 10 to 15 minutes, or until just tender. Drain potatoes in a colander and cool. Potatoes may be prepared up to this point 1 day ahead and chilled, covered.

Halve potatoes crosswise. In a 10- to 12-inch non-stick skillet heat 1 1/2 tablespoons oil with 1/2 tablespoon thyme and salt to taste over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking and add half of potatoes, cut sides down. Cook potatoes, without stirring, until cut sides are golden and crusty, about 5 minutes, and toss potatoes, shaking skillet, to coat with oil.

Transfer cooked potatoes to a serving bowl and cook remaining potatoes with remaining oil and thyme in same manner. Serves 6.

Thyme:

This herb tastes green and slightly peppery, with a touch of clove. Though it lends foods a little pizzazz on its own-try sprinkling on fish before grilling-most cooks prize it for its effectiveness at marrying other flavors. If the stew needs some snap, thyme can help by encouraging the ingredients to cooperate. When the vinegrette needs "just a little something" many cooks reach for thyme. Swirl into soups during the last five minutes of cooking, and add it to polenta and risotto. - from Hurley's *The Good Herb*

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.

ZUCCHINI WITH GARLIC AND DRIED
CRUSHED RED PEPPER, Bon Appétit, August
2003

3 tablespoons olive oil
2 pounds zucchini, halved crosswise, each half
cut lengthwise into 4 flat slices
4 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 teaspoon dried crushed red pepper
Sea salt (preferably fleur de sel)
1 tablepoon chopped fresh thyme

Heat oil in heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add zucchini; sauté until slices are light golden and tender, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and red pepper; stir 1 minute. Season to taste with sea salt. Transfer zucchini to serving platter, sprinkle with thyme, and serve. Makes 6 servings.

BROCCOLI WITH GARLIC AND
PARMESAN CHEESE,
Bon Appétit, Too Busy To Cook?, November
1999, Lisa Zwirn

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons chopped garlic
2 teaspoons grated lemon peel
2 pounds broccoli, crowns cut into florets and
stalks thinly sliced
1/2 cup water
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese (about 1 1/2
ounces)

Heat oil in large skillet over high heat. Add garlic and lemon peel and stir 30 seconds. Add broccoli and toss to coat. Add 1/2 cup water. Cover skillet and cook until broccoli is crisp-tender and water has cooked away, about 4 to 5 minutes. Add cheese and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper. Makes 4 servings.

Veggie Notes

From Mariquita: Potatoes, lemon and armenian cucumbers, summer squash, broccoli, garlic, thyme. From High Ground Organics: Potatoes, strawberries, artichokes, salad mix, cabbage.

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