

In your box this week:
New Red Potatoes
Dill
Beets
Carrots
Arugula
Fennel
Basil
Mystery

Initial Veggie Notes from Julia

Storage: Everything in your box this week should be stored in the fridge except for the basil. It will all keep better if kept colder. Separate the greens from the roots on the carrots. For the basil, some folks like to keep it in the fridge, but if it gets too cold it will turn black and unusable. I like to keep it on the counter and use it up in a day or two or three. Some refrigerators are a bit warmer in the door, that might work. Find what works best for you in your kitchen.

To eat within 1-3 days: berries! But the potatoes should be eaten within the week, as they haven't been cured and will rot if you leave them for weeks in your fridge.

What I would (and likely will) do with this week's box: Roast the beets and make a salad to eat for lunch a few days in a row. Add dill to the salad! Cook the fennel at the bottom of a soup or red sauce as you would use celery. I love cooked fennel! Give my son the chore of making the potatoes, he eats them with butter and salt while I munch on the cooking greens. More recipes are below....

Andy and Stephen both had a spastic beginning to the week with lots of on-the-hoof spontaneous decision making, such as Steve's

surprise at an outbreak of mildew in some greens and a sudden drop in berry production; Andy was alarmed to see his onions had not swelled up the way he wanted and his strawberries went down in production too! Noone had time to think about writing a newsletter article, so here's a note Andy wrote about visiting neighbor Betty Van Dyke and her cherries and caper bushes.

Black Republicans

I had never seen so many Black Republicans gathered together in one place. But the nice thing about being a farmer is the people you meet. If I had followed my father's advice and become a lawyer I guess I'd hang out with cops and criminals and be happy in their company. But I like to eat. So I found myself one sunny morning this week with Betty Van Dyke tasting cherries in her orchard. Betty Van Dyke is a stone fruit grower and a neighbor. Black Republicans, at least these plump, sweet, firm fleshed, juicy Black Republicans, are cherries. The popular Bing cherry, Betty told me, is not self-pollinating so the orchardist must intersperse other varieties of cherry throughout the orchard to get a crop. I've gotten to know Betty Van Dyke over the years because I once worked at an organic produce company that sold her cherries. The Van Dyke cherries are as good as cherries can get and I would remember Betty for that alone except that she is also a very interesting woman in her own right. The funny thing is I didn't visit Betty to eat Black Republicans; it had come to my attention that Betty had a caper bush and makes her own salted, pickled capers. If I came soon, Betty said, I'd even see the capers in flower.

Capers are prepared from the unopened flower buds of the caper bush, *Capparis spinosa*. *Spinosa* implies spines but Betty pointed out that her caper bush, a cultivar from the Croatian island of Vis in the Adriatic, was spineless. Considering how the caper picker has to reach into the plant to pluck the tiny buds a spineless cultivar is a real blessing. Betty's family comes from Komiza, a town on Vis, and she was introduced to capers when she was given a large quantity of them to take back to the States after

she visited there in 1969. A big pile of capers is a lavish gift. The buds are tiny and it takes a lot of labor to harvest them. Being a farmer it's hard for me to see any task on the ranch without automatically translating the work into payroll figures. Capers need to be picked every day if the grower is going to get the entire crop. A bud that is too small one day will be too large a few days later. Betty picks her capers to sell in the Capitola farmers market but she concedes it is a labor of love. Ten minutes with Betty picking capers convinced me that in California, labor costs being what they are, caper production will remain in the hands of food lovers. Lets hear it for love!

I couldn't help myself so I ate some capers raw. They're not too good that way. Through salting and pickling the distinctive caper flavor is brought out in the bud. Capric acid forms in the curing process and the unique zing this acid gives to sauces like puttanesca or remoulade makes capers an essential ingredient in Mediterranean cookery. Most commercial capers come from France, Spain and Italy, but the caper is cultivated around the Mediterranean and all the way to India. The island of Vis, where Betty's family comes from is in Croatia but the island is so close to Italy that in the night time they can see the lights of Abruzzia. I wonder who picks the capers in Italian caper fields and I half suspect they are Croatian migrants. I looked at my tiny harvest from ten minutes labor and figured I could never hold down a job as a caper plucker. I did take a nice picture of a caper bloom I can share with you, though. The caper flower is gorgeous and a whole shrub of them would be a sight to behold. My time was well spent. I had a nice morning with a great lady and learned a lot. Heck, I even found out where all the Black Republicans are hiding.

P.s. About those Black Republicans: in 1860 an orchardist in Oregon, Seth Lewelling, expressed his pro-Union sentiments by naming a new cherry cultivar he developed the Black Republican. Then in 1875 he developed another cherry variety from the seed of a Black Republican and he named the new cherry after his Chinese ranch foreman, a fellow named Bing.

P.p.s. Betty Van Dyke sells her capers at the Eastcliff/Liveoak Farmers Market in Santa Cruz on Sundays and the Capitola Farmers Market on Thursdays. San Francisco is still The City but we do have a few treasures hidden out here in the hinterlands.

copyright 2004 Andy Griffin
<http://www.ladybugletter.com>

Recipes from Julia

Do you still have Bok Choy in the fridge? I recommend you make a simple brothy soup (miso or chicken?) And or make some fried rice. You can add any scallions left from last week to either of these too.
<http://www.mariquita.com/recipes/bok%20choy.html>

FENNEL:

Fennel and Cheese for Dessert

adapted from The Victory Garden Cookbook by M. Morash

Fennel bulbs

One great cheese, such as blue cheese or a local goat cheese

best olive oil

S & P

Wash and trim fennel bulbs. If small, cut in half; quarter larger ones. Serve with slices of cheese and pass the oil, salt, and pepper.

PARMESAN-TOPPED FENNEL PUREE

adapted from: recipeland.com

1 1/2 lb Potatoes, peeled & quartered

2 Fennel bulbs, trimmed and chopped

2 c chicken or vegetable broth

1/2 c milk

2 Tablespoons butter, melted
Salt to taste
White pepper to taste
2 Tablespoons Grated Parmesan
2 Tablespoons Flavored bread crumbs

Boil potatoes until tender; about 30 minutes. Drain well. Transfer to a mixing bowl and mash well. Meanwhile, in another saucepan, combine fennel with the broth and cook over medium heat until tender; about 15 minutes. Drain and puree in food processor. Add to potatoes along with the milk and butter. Then transfer to oven-proof casserole; top with Parmesan cheese and bread crumbs. Brown under broiler for a few minutes.

Fennel Recipes:

<http://www.mariquita.com/recipes/fennel.html>

DILL:

Roasted Beet Soup with Potato and Dill Salad

from the Lawrence-Emmanuels

1 1/2 Lbs. beets (about 5 medium, tops trimmed)

12 oz. Potatoes

2 1/2 C. low-fat milk

4 Tbsp. chopped red onion

4 Tbsp. chopped fresh dill

3 Tbsp. red wine vinegar

1/2 C. plain yogurt or sour cream

Preheat oven to 400 . Wrap beets and potatoes separately in foil; seal

tightly and roast on oven rack until tender when pierced with skewer

(or thin sharp knife). (About 45 minutes for potatoes and 1 1/2 hours for

beets) Unwrap and cool completely.

Peel beets and cut into 1 inch pieces. Place in blender with Milk, Vinegar

and half of the Dill and Onion. Blend until smooth, season to taste with

salt and pepper. Refrigerate until well chilled (about 1 hour).

Peel potatoes and cut into 1/4 inch dice. Toss in a bowl with remaining dill, onion and yogurt.

Ladle soup into 4 bowls and top with potato salad. garnish with dill sprigs.

Mariquita Farm/High Ground Organics

Two Small Farms

831.786.0625

<http://www.twosmallfarms.com>

PO Box 2065

Watsonville, CA 95077-2065