



Notes From the Pea Patch

Foxtail Community Farm

Week 10

August 2, 2010

Farmer's Notebook

Tomatoes may well be the foundation of the local food movement. There simply is no comparison between a fresh field-grown, vine-ripened tomato and a supermarket variety. This year's crop is all the more special because of last year's late blight epidemic, which decimated the tomato crop in our region.

Although commonly associated with Italian cooking, tomatoes are native to the Americas. They were cultivated by the Aztecs and Incas as far back as 700 A.D., and were introduced to Europe in the 1500s. These first wild tomatoes were husk tomatoes (still grown today), cherry-sized fruits wrapped in a papery husk. From these humble beginnings, tomatoes have exploded into a rainbow of purples, oranges, reds, yellows and greens, ranging in size from tiny cherries to 2+ pound beefsteaks.

We grow more varieties of tomatoes than any other crop, 14 this year (see reverse), including many heirloom varieties. The term "heirloom" refers to old-fashioned varieties chosen by growers for their unique qualities and preserved from generation to generation through open pollination and seed saving. In contrast, "hybrid" varieties are produced by crossing two strains selected through inbreeding for specific traits; while the offspring of this cross has the desired blend of traits (for example, color and size), the seeds saved from that offspring will not produce the same traits.

We start our tomatoes in the greenhouse in April and transplant to the fields in May. About a month after planting we prune off all branches on our hybrid tomatoes to encourage fruiting instead of leaf growth in the plant. We then stake, trellis and mulch with hay. These methods help prevent early and late blight, the most damaging problems affecting tomatoes. This year we applied baking soda as an organic method to prevent blight. Other problems affecting tomatoes include blossom end rot, caused by calcium deficiency, and tomato hornworm, a scary-looking giant caterpillar with a large spike on its end.

Some cracking and scabbing is typical on heirloom tomatoes, and does not generally affect taste. Tomatoes should be stored at room temperature. Refrigeration ruins their taste and texture.

This Week's Harvest

Cilantro – with its distinctive aroma and flavor, this herb is a common ingredient in Mexican cooking. Store wrapped in paper towels in a plastic bag in the fridge.

Purple Snap Beans – just like green beans, except purple! They will turn green when cooked, so serve raw for maximum effect. Wash and store in a plastic bag or container in the fridge.

Red Onions – every year one crop takes an unexpected (and sometimes inexplicable) vacation, and this may be that year for onions, which just aren't doing great. These sweet early onions are milder and juicier than storage onions. Store in fridge.

Also...

Carrots ~ Cucumbers ~ Eggplant ~
Green Peppers ~ Lettuce

Red Potatoes ~ Summer Squash ~ Tomatoes

Fruit Shares – Peaches from Fix Bros Farm in Hudson. The quintessential fruit of high summer. Peach trees are laden with fruit now – we picked 100 pounds in under 20 minutes! These are picked tree-ripe and will soften in a day or two when left on the counter (optimally in a single layer rather than stacked, which will contribute to bruising). If desired, move to fridge when ripe. Wash before eating. *Conventionally grown.*

Our antidote to fruit flies: fill a shallow bowl (a jar lid works well) with apple cider vinegar. Add a drop of dish soap. Place behind your fruit bowl. Empty and replace daily.

Members with smaller size shares may not receive all items or quantities described

COMING ATTRACTIONS!

- ◆ Basil & Parsley
- ◆ Sweet Red Peppers
- ◆ More blueberries?



Recipe of the Week: Bean & Tomato Salad with Honey Vinaigrette

This simple recipe highlights the flavors and colors of the summer garden. Adapted from a recipe in Eating Well in Season: the Farmer's Market Cookbook.

- 3 cups cooked or canned cannellini beans, drained
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup minced red onion
- ¼ cup cider vinegar
- 4 tsp local honey
- 1 tsp peanut or canola oil
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 heaping cup green beans, cut into 2" pieces
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ cup fresh basil leaves, thinly sliced

Combine beans with salt, onion, vinegar, honey, oil and pepper in a large bowl. Stir, cover and refrigerate at least one hour or overnight.

Cook green beans in a large pot of boiling water until crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Drain, rinse with cold water, and pat dry. Add to marinated beans. Stir in cherry tomatoes and basil. Season with pepper.



Member Corner:

The best thing I made with my share last week was...

- ◆ A grilled zucchini sandwich with Havariti cheese and wasabi mayonnaise on sour dough bread from Rock Hill Bakery
- ◆ Swiss chard with raisins and onions
- ◆ The first ratatouille of the season, made before the first eggplants had arrived. What would you call that -- zucchitouille?
- ◆ Red cabbage gazpacho
- ◆ A cold salad with julienned beets, Granny Smith apples and carrots, with caramelized pecans and a honey mustard dressing
- ◆ Cold curried zucchini soup
- ◆ The pint of cherry tomatoes consumed by myself and the kids before we even knew what else was in the box!

A GUIDE TO FOXTAIL TOMATOES



Hybrids

Big Beef- large, red beefsteak tomato. Has been a favorite main season tomato in the past, but variety seems to be losing some vigor.

Early Girl – a high-yielding small red slicer that has become a Foxtail standby, with surprisingly good flavor and texture for an early tomato.

Jet Star- medium-sized red tomato with a good reputation that we're trialing to replace Big Beef.

Heirlooms

Rutgers- medium-sized red slicing tomato. A new tomato for us, this variety was developed by Campbell's Soup Co. in 1928.

Jubilee- large, golden tomato. We started this one two years ago and were surprised by its production. Good taste, meaty texture and lovely appearance.

Brandywine- large (1+ lbs), irregularly shaped, pink tomatoes. The benchmark for heirlooms, many consider this the best tasting tomato.

Cosmonaut Volkov – a juicy early red slicer that we love for both its flavor and awesome name.

Green Zebra- unusual smallish, green striped tomatoes with rich and juicy green flesh.

Cherokee Purple- Eric's pick for best tasting slicer. This large, dusky purple tomato often cracks on the vine and can be hard to get to the share box intact.

Rose de Berne- a new variety for us, these small, pink tomatoes from France are described as hybrids in appearance but heirlooms in taste.

Cherry Tomatoes

Peacevine- a small, tasty red cherry that we've been very happy with the past two seasons.

Sungold- Hands down our favorite cherry tomato. We have watched our children choose these little gold nuggets over candy. Prone to splitting after rain.

Black Cherry – our first year growing this late cherry, with dusky purple color and complex flavor.

White Cherry – another new one for us, with pale, almost translucent icy yellow skin and mild flavor.