



# Notes From the Pea Patch

Foxtail Community Farm

Week 14

August 30, 2010

## Wife's Farmer's ^ Notebook

As the summer garden starts to wind down, it's time to put away food for the winter months. Actually, this is an activity we've been working at all season, but the pace picks up as the most intense period of field work comes to an end. We try to devote at least one evening each week to preserving extra produce – an investment we are glad that we made come February!

There are four basic methods of preserving food in a home kitchen: freezing, canning, drying and common storage (pantry or root cellar). The best method depends on the crop and your own preferences. We recommend adding any of the excellent reference books on this subject to your kitchen library (we use Storey's *Keeping the Harvest* and the classic *Ball Blue Book of Preserving*).

Freezing is probably the most all-purpose method of preserving. It is quick, easy, safe and preserves both flavor and nutrition better than other methods. A trade off is the financial and environmental cost of electricity, but this can be minimized with good practices. A chest freezer is a highly worthwhile investment, as a freezer compartment in the fridge is not cold enough for long term storage.

Fruit should be fully ripe before freezing. Most fruit can simply be washed and popped right into freezer bags - great for baking, fruit toppings or smoothies (*Mom hint*: when kids take three bites of a beautiful peach and then say they are done, trim off the bite margins, then wash and freeze the rest for smoothies). To preserve perfect fruit for special uses, flash freeze it by individually arranging washed and well-dried fruit on baking trays, freezing solid on sheets in the freezer, then packing into rigid freezer containers.

Herbs can also be frozen as an alternate to drying. Simply wash, spread to dry, chop to desired state, then freeze in jars or other freezer containers. Make basil or other herbs into pesto and freeze the paste in ice-cube trays, then pop into freezer bags.

*(continued on reverse)*

## This Week's Harvest

**Garlic** – it is always gratifying to start deliveries of garlic after its year-long journey. Garlic cloves are planted in October. They sprout in the fall, then lie dormant over the winter. In the spring the sprout grows and produces a flowering scape (remember these?) while the bulb finishes growing. A month later the bulbs are harvested and dried. They can then be stored and used all year. Some of the cloves are kept from the harvested bulbs to be replanted in the fall.

**Golden Beets** – a lovely, mild-flavored variety of beet that we started growing at member request several years ago. Remove edible greens and store separately in fridge. Try them roasted with carrots and potatoes...sunny and delicious!

**Potatoes** – Keuka Gold, a variety developed at Cornell. Buff-skinned with light yellow flesh, these should be very good for mashing. Store unwashed in a cool, dark place for up to several weeks; scrub, trim and peel (if desired) before using.

**Watermelon** – Another crop which was mostly a complete loss due to deer damage. We managed to save a few for large shares this week.

Also...

**Cucumbers ~ Green Snap Beans**

**Tomatoes ~ Summer Squash ~ Sweet Peppers**

**Fruit Shares** – Peaches from Boehm Farm in Climax (Greene County). Picked tree ripe; to complete ripening, place stem-side down in a cool area, then store in fridge. Handle gently to avoid bruising. Wash before eating. *Conventionally grown using Integrated Pest Management methods.*

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

## COMING ATTRACTIONS!

- ◆ Sweet Onions
- ◆ Edamame



## Recipe of the Week: Vegetable Moussaka

*We have been eating a lot of Mediterranean-inspired meals this summer. On hot nights, you don't need much more than pita bread, good hummus, olives and fresh raw cucumbers and tomatoes. With some cooler days arriving, this more substantial dish will make a nice centerpiece for such a meal. Adapted from Recipes from America's Small Farms cookbook.*

- extra virgin olive oil
- freshly ground black pepper
- 1 lg or 2 medium eggplant and/or summer squash, peeled and cut diagonally into ¼ inch thick slices
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 tbs butter
- 2 medium potatoes, thinly sliced
- ½ tbs chopped fresh oregano
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 4 oz goat or feta cheese, crumbled
- 2 medium tomatoes, sliced ¼ inch thick
- ½ cup plain low fat Greek-style yogurt
- 2 tbs chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ tsp lemon juice

Heat ½ tbs olive oil and several grinds of pepper in a large skillet over medium heat. Cook eggplant and/or squash slices about 3 minutes each side, pressing firmly with the spatula to make full contact with the pan. Set aside cooked slices. In same pan, sauté onions and garlic in another tbs oil for 2-3 minutes.

Heat oven to 350°F. Spread butter around inside of 9" square baking dish. Place a layer of potatoes. Sprinkle with half the oregano, salt and more black pepper. Add half the eggplant/squash, sprinkle with half the garam masala and half the cheese. Top with half the tomato slices. Add the onion and garlic mixture. Repeat potato, eggplant/squash, cheese and tomato layers. Bake uncovered about 45-60 minutes, until potatoes are tender.

Prepare yogurt sauce by combining yogurt, parsley and lemon juice in bowl and refrigerating. Top moussaka with yogurt sauce when served.



## Farmer's Notebook, *continued...*

Most vegetables (peppers are a notable exception) should be blanched prior to freezing. Blanching refers to scalding vegetables to stop enzyme actions and preserve color and vitamins. This is basically just one extra step in a fairly simple process:

- 1) **Sort, wash and chop.** Select high quality produce. Vegetables can be slightly immature. Chop to whatever size you are most likely to need for later cooking convenience.
- 2) **Blanch.** Boil a large pot of water and immerse vegetables in the water. A steamer basket insert works perfectly. Alternately, you can blanch by steaming. *See chart below.*
- 3) **Cool.** Prompt cooling is critical to stop the cooking process. Fill the sink with ice water and move the vegetables directly from the blanching pot to the sink. Swish to cool for the same amount of time as you blanched.
- 4) **Drain and dry.** Be as thorough as you can to prevent ice crystal formation. Towels, a small fan or a salad spinner can be used.
- 5) **Package.** Use containers or bags specifically labeled for freezer use. Leave ~ 1/2" headroom in rigid containers. Press out air from bags, seal well and label with item and date. Store for up to a year in a full-sized freezer.

When you are ready to use, remove vegetables from freezer and place in 1/2" of boiling water. Cover and boil just briefly for best texture, color and flavor. Frozen vegetables need very little cooking and will taste much better when not overcooked. Enjoy!

### Blanching Times for Selected Vegetables (time in minutes):

<i>Vegetable</i>	<i>Boiling Water</i>	<i>Steaming</i>
Broccoli or Cauliflower	3	5
Cabbage (shredded)	1 ½	1
Carrots (sliced)	2	3
Corn (blanch on cob, then remove)	4	5
Greens (kale, spinach, etc)	2	4
Green Beans (whole)	3	4
Root Vegetables (cubed)	2 ½	3 ½



*Stay tuned for Part 2 in this series, to include more information about canning methods.*