



Notes From the Pea Patch

Foxtail Community Farm

Season 6, Week 17

September 29, 2011

Farmer's Notebook

Three weeks ago, we started a totally new system for packing CSA shares. In our previous system, we lined up all the empty share boxes (grouped by site and share size) and packed one item at a time. So, for example, we would start with a harvest crate full of winter squash, moving down the lines of boxes putting one or two squash in each box. Then we would go get the next harvest crate of, say, beets and make the rotation again, putting a bunch of beets in each box. We'd repeat this for each crop. It was a fine system, and it worked for us for the last six years, though we definitely noted that the time needed to pack shares has increased each year as the number of shares has grown.

Then a few Sundays ago, while cleaning up the packing shed, I had one of those "a-ha" moments. An hour later, I had completely rearranged the space into a new assembly line, which Shelby and I tried out the very next day for Monday deliveries. Instead of rotating through the share boxes over and over with each crop, we lined up all the harvest crates on a newly-placed central table, in the order in which they would be packed. We picked up an empty share box, started at the front, and worked our way down the line, filling the box item-by-item. When we got to the end, the full box went right into the delivery van, we circled back to the front of the line, grabbed another empty box and repeated the whole process another 29 times. The result: packing time was instantly reduced by about one-third.

This seemingly modest change is part of a theme we're experiencing this year: small changes that make a big difference in efficiency as our CSA membership grows. When we started the CSA six years ago, we had 15 shares, and taking a few extra minutes per share on packing, site delivery or paperwork didn't have a big impact overall. Now we have 60 shares, and a few extra minutes per share on any given activity quickly adds up to many hours of valuable time.

~ Continued on reverse ~

This Week's Harvest

Delicata Squash – this attractive cream-and-green-striped winter squash is a perennial CSA member favorite. While delicata's thin skin makes it unsuitable for long-term storage, it also makes it easier to peel than hardier winter squash varieties like acorn or butternut. Store in a cool, dry place (a cupboard with good air circulation works well).

Red Onions – these have now been cured and are suitable for storage in a cool, dry area for ~ 2 months.

Tatsoi and/or Arugula - also known as "rocket salad" in Britain, arugula is a mildly peppery green that can be eaten raw or cooked. It's wonderful in salads and can be used in place of basil to make pesto. Tatsoi is a baby cousin of Bok choy – milder but still with a pleasant peppery taste. It can be stir-fried or eaten raw in salad. Both should be stored loosely wrapped in damp paper towels inside a plastic bag in the fridge crisper drawer for 3-4 days.

Sage - an aromatic, soft-flavored leafy herb that works with nearly any vegetable or meat, but is especially prized for stuffing. A simple butter and sage sauce is fabulous on pumpkin-filled ravioli. Extra leaves can be hung to dry or frozen.

Also...

**Carrots ~ Garlic ~ Sweet Peppers
Tomatoes (Lg. Shares) ~ Beans**

Fruit Shares – No fruit share this week. We are still working on grapes, but it looks like the orchard we get them from won't have enough this year due to wind damage from Irene.

Flower Shares – probably the last week of flowers for this season – hope you enjoyed them!

Coming Attractions

- Butternut Squash
- Celeriac
- Potatoes



Recipes of the Week: Family-Friendly Finger Foods

As the weather cools I'm more willing to fire up the oven, opening up some possibilities for creative and nutritious afternoon snacks. Here are two CSA favorites for you to try – let us know what you think!

No-noodle Vegetable Kugel

This is adapted from a recipe I got from Eric's step mom Paula. You can substitute any of your favorite seasonal vegetables. It would make a fine simple meal with a green salad and soup or fruit.

- 6 eggs
- ¾ cup olive oil
- 1 cup unbleached white flour
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- 1 ½ tbs sugar
- 3 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp salt + freshly ground black pepper
- ~2 cups grated or finely diced vegetables – try arugula or tatsoi, carrot, onion, garlic, peppers
- 1 tbs fresh herbs, diced
- ¾ cup grated cheese of your choice, or a mix

Beat eggs with oil. Add dry ingredients and mix well. Mix in remaining ingredients. Spread in a lightly greased 9x13" pan. Bake at 350°F for 35-40 minutes, until golden brown and a toothpick comes out clean. Let cool, then cut into squares. Serve warm or cold.

Delicata Squash Rings



A fun side dish both kids and grown ups will enjoy munching on. You can actually skip the initial peeling and peel away the cooked rind from the individual rings as you eat them, if you prefer.

- Delicata squash (1 per 2-3 people)
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and pepper *or* Cinnamon-sugar

Peel skin from squash with a vegetable peeler. Slice off the ends and carefully scoop out seeds with a teaspoon. Slice the squash cross-wise into rings about 1/3 inch thick. Heat 1 ½ tbs. olive oil in a large skillet. Add squash rings and fry over medium heat about 5-6 minutes, or until nicely browned on the bottom. Turn and cook the second side. Drain on paper towels. Sprinkle with salt and pepper or cinnamon-sugar and serve.

~ Continued from front ~

And so, we are making some small but meaningful changes in our organizational practices. We stopped labeling boxes with individual member names, which markedly reduced the time spent packing and delivering share boxes. We added late fees for share payments, and the time spent on email follow-up went down considerably. We restructured the member work commitment to have fewer work days with sign-up at the beginning of the season, and had significantly higher participation and productivity from member workers. Not to mention the countless practices I'm continuously honing in the field to increase efficiency there.

As the CSA continues to grow (we plan to offer 100 shares by Season 10!) we'll keep perfecting these small changes – in the field and in the office - that make a big difference!



Last Reminder: Harvest Home Festival is this Sunday!



Join us on the farm this **Sunday October 2nd anytime between 1:00 – 4:00 pm** for a celebration of the fall harvest and the fast-approaching end of the CSA season.

We will have a variety of seasonal activities going on all afternoon, including tractor-drawn hay rides, pick-your-own pumpkins, gourd-painting and a small barnyard bonfire. There will be hot and cold cider and snacks, including a tasting of this year's traditional and specialty Foxtail preserves. We'll also kick off our annual pantry sale this day – so you can get first dibs on this year's products! Hope to see you there!