

STUDENT ORGANIC FARM CSA NEWSLETTER

October 21, 2004

In your share this week (this week's list of crops, including specific varieties for those who are interested– we got most of our seeds from Johnny's Selected Seeds in Maine, but some also from Fedco Seeds in Maine, and a few other smaller seed catalogs):

- Broccoli-mixed varieties, but mostly Marathon (for detailed descriptions of most of the different varieties of crops we grow, see www.johnnyseeds.com)
- Mokum Carrots
- Hakurei turnips
- Ventura Celery
- Mei qing choi – a variety of “baby” pac choi
- Red and/or green Tomatoes-mixed varieties
- Pink Beauty Radishes
- Bright Lights Swiss Chard OR Mixed Baby beets with greens (your choice)
- Lincoln Leeks
- Red Cloud Potatoes (*think Potato-Leek Soup*)
- U-pick herbs: parsley, oregano, chives, thyme, lemon balm, mint (I know we said U-pick season was over, but the herbs are still there – come on back and pick until the snow covers everything)

Announcements

1. **Share balances are due Thursday, Oct. 21.** All members who did not pay their \$350 share price in full should have received a letter in the mail with your balance owed. If you did not receive a letter, or don't know how much you owe, please email msufarm@msu.edu and ask for your balance. Checks should be made out to MSU, with “Fall 2004 CSA” on the memo line. Mail checks to Michelle Ferrarese, MSU Dept. of Horticulture, A288 Plant and Soil Science Building, East Lansing MI 48824.

If you split a share with someone and owe a balance, please send in only one check for the total balance; simplify our records. ☺ Thank you!

2. **Garlic Planting Costume Party at the SOF next Tuesday, Oct. 26, from 4:00 p.m. until we finish, or til dark, whichever comes first.** Arrive any time between 4:00 and dark. Costumes are optional and encouraged – prize for best garlic-planting costume! Don't let the costume contest scare you

away – it's optional; feel free to “dress up” as a farm volunteer if you prefer. We'll have hot (or cold) cider and donuts (and any treats you bring) afterward. **Treats** are always welcome. All farm friends and members are invited out to help with this fun fall job, so bring more folks, including kids, and be prepared to get muddy, cold, and wet (but good weather is predicted, so keep your fingers crossed). Vampires welcome, but keep in mind the nature of the event.

3. **REMINDER: CSA PICK-UP AT THE FARM IS THURSDAY, FROM 4:00-6:30, NO EARLIER, NO LATER.** IF YOU SHOW UP EARLY, YOUR HELP WILL BE GREATLY APPRECIATED IN SETTING UP FOR DISTRIBUTION. IF YOU SHOW UP LATE, YOUR HELP WILL BE GREATLY APPRECIATED IN TAKING THINGS DOWN AND CLEANING UP. IF YOU CAN'T COME BETWEEN 4:00 AND 6:30, PLEASE CALL OR EMAIL EARLIER THAT WEEK TO ARRANGE TO PICK UP YOUR SHARE ON CAMPUS OR OUT OF OUR COOLER AT THE FARM FRIDAY OR MONDAY (this last option is a last resort – the Hort Farm is very accommodating to us on Thursdays, when you all are coming and going, but Fridays and every other day they tend to drive huge tractors at breakneck speeds where you might walk, and they appreciate if we limit our human traffic to Thursday afternoons, unless you're volunteering at the farm). Thanks!

4. You are invited to join us at a nation-wide conference all about CSA farming, **“Growing Together: A Conference for Community Supported Agriculture”** happening here in Michigan, **Nov. 12-14**. The conference is aimed at CSA farmers, active members, small farm and community health advocates, and educators and extension personnel. The faculty, staff, and graduate student leaders of the SOF will present a workshop on the development of the SOF at MSU. If you're interested in learning more about CSA, meeting some visionary and inspiring leaders in the CSA movement, sharing your ideas and experience, and eating good food, please join us in Tustin, MI (near Cadillac) at the Kettunen Center. Some of our farm family, including Laura Delind, professor of Anthropology here at MSU, and Susan Houghton, farmer at Giving Tree Farm in Lansing, have organized and helped make this conference happen—thank you so much, Laura and Sue!

I believe there was a late fee, but they've decided to wave it – you've still got time to register. For more information, call 1-877-526-1441, and/or email csafarm@jackpine.com. See the web page at <http://tcf.itgo.com>.

4. Volunteering: Many Saturdays we will be at the farm in the morning. If you've always wanted to volunteer but couldn't make it during the week, now's your chance! There is lots of **weeding** to do, **potatoes** to dig, irrigation **tape** to take out of the fields, **greenhouse plastic** to replace and repair, **herbs** to bunch and dry, **garlic** to clean, **signs** to paint, and more. If you can do any of those things, please give the farm phone a call during the week (517-230-7987), and let us know when you can come out! Don't limit yourself to weekends, however; feel free to drop by any weekday but Thursday, from 8-5. If you want to volunteer on Thursday (harvest and CSA day), please call first so we can plan accordingly.

5. *Still* another VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY: We need to **pick up a truckload (pickup truck) of wooden crates** from a farm in Tipton, near Adrian. It's the home and farm of Beverly Ruesink and Oriana Bosma, two SOF alumnae, who are generously donating old, no longer used apple crates to the SOF. If you have a mid- or large-sized pickup truck (or van, or trailer), and would like to visit some former SOFers while doing the farm a huge favor, please send an email to Michelle, and/or call the farm phone. The whole trip will probably take 3-4 hours, including driving, loading, and unloading (and probably touring their farm while you're there!).

What's up at the farm?

Transitioning from the fields to the hoopouses, or "high tunnels" as our source of fresh produce for you. This year will be our second winter of growing fresh greens, salad, herbs, and root veggies in the unheated hoopouses all through the winter. As we wrap up this current, fall, session of CSA (through mid-December), we'll continue to harvest carrots, beets, leeks, spinach, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, collard greens, Swiss chard, salad mix, turnips, parsnips, and rutabagas out of the fields, from under straw mulch and probably snow toward the end! At the same time, we'll start drawing on our storage veggies – winter squash, onions, garlic, and some of the root veggies and cabbage that we harvest for cooler-storage rather than field-mulched, over-wintered storage. (Can't you feel your body settling into cold-weather, earthy, rooty slowness for winter?) And the most unique thing about your CSA, of course, is that we'll be harvesting baby salad greens, Asian greens – choi of all kinds, Napa cabbage, mizuna, mibuna, tatsoi, etc, chard, spinach, lettuce, more fresh root veggies (protected by plastic tunnels rather than straw in this case), herbs (dill, parsley, cilantro), and probably more, out of the hoopouses.

This week's share includes three things from the houses: radishes, turnips, and mei qing choi. These were plantings that we'd intended to hold over a little longer, but they're bursting at the seams, as it were. The premise behind winter growing in the houses is that in the Persephone period, from mid-November til early February or so, when the days are shortest, plants don't grow much if any. But if they're cold-hardy and already mature or nearly so by the time the dark sets in, they will "hang out" in the ground until we're ready to harvest them. (We've begun to think of the hoopouses as "living refrigerators" for that reason.) The trick is in the timing of plantings, so that the crops are just about ready to harvest by mid-November, but not too much sooner, like what happened with this week's three hoopouse items.

Weather (temperature and light availability) affects the time it takes for a seed or plant in the hoopouse to mature to harvestable size, and every fall is different. As you recall, last fall and winter were cold and harsh, and we planted a bit late in the houses last year – several of our crops never matured before the dark set in, and so when days lengthened again in spring, they thought they'd seen a year go by, and in the case of the biennials, they bolted, or sent up flowering stalks, instead of growing bigger. We drew on last year's experience to try to plant earlier this year – and we ended up with a warm, sunny fall, and many things grew faster than we'd imagined!

Since we only had 25 members last year, we had back-up crops to fill your shares, but this winter, there are 50 of you, which means we have a lot less wiggle-room. So, in order to ensure that the *next* planting (that goes into the space these three crops are vacating) has a chance to establish before the dark and cold really takes hold, you're getting these items sooner rather than later, and we'll hope this next generation gets going quickly and we can harvest *it* later this winter.

Thank you so much for your support this fall – I hope that you will all stay with us this winter/spring for our second go at the truly experimental time of the farming year. Just FYI, there are over 40 people on the waitlist already for spring (Jan-Apr)!! You're all invited, of course, to renew your membership with a guaranteed spot ***until December 2, 2004***. After that, if there are shares unclaimed, we'll open it up to folks on the waitlist. You can still join after Dec. 2; your spot is just not guaranteed. You can renew for as many sessions as you want, as soon as you want. Don't hold back. Your support in the form of membership fees will keep the CSA running.

And your involvement in the farm will keep it in line with your needs and interests. If there is a particular crop you'd like to see us try growing over the winter, please let us know! It's a little late for planting in the unheated houses, but we do have a heated greenhouse that we use as backup, just in case we get a

really cold snap and lose, for example, all the head lettuce in the unheated houses. We'll do lots of head lettuce (not Iceberg; I just mean heads of leaf lettuce, as opposed to baby salad mix), fennel, celery, and a few other crops that are a little less cold-hardy than those in the hoopouses. And we may be able to try out special requests in there this winter – as always, just ask!

We're thinking of forming a member-based core group to help make CSA and farm decisions – if you have CSA leadership experience, or would like to, please be in touch; it might start this coming year – no plans yet, but please get in the discussion if you're interested.

And remember, garlic planting next Tuesday – costumes encouraged!

Recipe Ideas/New Vegetables?

Lots of Brassicas, or mustard-family, this week! Partly due to their early maturation in the hoopouses, we needed to harvest them to make room in there for another quick successional planting, so you're getting a crucifer-laden share this week: radishes, turnips, and mei qing choi. Enjoy!

Hakurei turnips: Our old members will be the first to say these turnips are like tangy, juicy candy. If you've had bad turnip experience in the past, these Japanese sweeties will give you a new relationship to the humble roots. If you've never had turnips before, I'm sorry to say you'll have unrealistic expectations of any other turnip after you've had these. Turnips (*Brassica rapa*) belong to the mustard, or Brassicaceae, family, so they have that deliciously pungent, cruciferous flavor, but the Hakurei variety is more mellow, more delicate than any other turnip I've had. Please reserve judgment until you've tried these – we eat the roots whole like apples around the farm, and the greens are delicious steamed or stirfried, too. (But this particular planting had some insect and slug damage, so we'll take the leaves off – you can ask for the greens if you don't mind the lacy patterns chewed into them) Try turnips raw, cut like carrot sticks, or steamed lightly, or mixed with potatoes, carrots, onions, and garlic in a Roasted Root Mix. (FYI: We do grow other turnip varieties; these are just my favorites – you'll get the chance to choose your own favorite)

Mei qing choi: All of the Chois (*Brassica rapa, Chinensis group*) are tender, juicy, crispy-stemmed members of the mustard family as well. For agricultural and nutritional purposes, we include things like Komatsuna, Pac Choi, Tatsoi, Joi Choi, and the curious-sounding “Vitamin Green” from Johnny's catalog in this group of plants. Mei qing choi is the smallest variety we grow at the farm (remember those huge Komatsunas and Pac Chois from last spring?), and is often sold in stores as “baby” pac choi (or bok choi – same thing). One of my favorite

snacks is a head of choy, any variety, eaten raw as I walk around the farm. They're so tender, crisp, and full of water that they make excellent fresh snacks. You can, of course, stirfry them in sesame oil with garlic, ginger, tamari, and hot chile sauce for a quick, yummy dinner with rice or noodles (add tofu or meat if you like). The cool thing about stirfrying these leaves is that the green leafy part wilts and cooks quickly, while the white stem part stays crisp and juicy, so you get a wonderful combination of textures from one leaf, cooked briefly over high heat.

Any of the "choi" group can be substituted for cabbage or Napa cabbage in fresh salads or slaws – try the same recipe with many different green leafy veggies; see which ones are your favorites. Stay tuned in coming weeks for fermentation ideas – the chois, along with Napa cabbage, head cabbage, and most members of the Brassicaceae, make wonderful fermented kimchee, sauerkraut, etc.

Potatoes and Leeks: OK, so these aren't new to anyone, but in combination, they make the classic Potato-Leek soup. I have an affinity for potato-leek soup (and turnip soup – same reason; read on...), because it brings back memories of my first full season as a farm intern, at Drumlin Farm in Lincoln, Massachusetts. My co-intern, Amanda, and I went to the farmers' market in Boston every Thursday night (it's an afternoon-evening market), and in the fall, when we had leftover potatoes and leeks, we'd swing by Matt Murphy's Irish Pub in Brookline to make a "donation," for which they eventually started to "donate" in exchange two pints of stout and two bowls of soup. I think they liked the quality of the produce and the personal relationship and barter system with local farmers.... or maybe just the goofy sight of two dirty young farmers pushing through the crowd with big orange crates on our heads. So potato-leek, and turnip, soup hold a special place in my heart and tastebuds. I've been working to approximate Matt Murphy's traditional Irish soups ever since, and I suspect they add stout or some other unlikely ingredient, since I've never quite gotten the taste I remember from Brookline, but really, how wrong can you go with fresh, organic potatoes and leeks, whole milk and cream, and lots of pepper? See below for a recipe to start you on your own quest for the perfect potato-leek soup.

Potato-Leek Soup from the *Enchanted Broccoli Forest* by Mollie Katzen

3 medium potatoes, scrubbed, and cut into 1" chunks

3 cups cleaned, chopped leeks

1-2 stalks celery, chopped

1-2 large carrots, chopped

4 cups water or soup stock

1 1/2 tsp salt (note: most Mollie Katzen recipes require doubling herbs and spices –

consider your own salt affinity; you may want to add more -MF)

1 cup milk, cream, or soy milk

lots of freshly ground pepper

Optional fresh herbs: thyme, marjoram, parsley, basil....

1. Place clean, cut up potatoes in a soup pot or Dutch oven with the leeks, celery, carrots, water or stock, and salt. Bring to a boil, cover, cook until potatoes are tender (about 20 min). Remove from heat, and let cool until it's cool enough to puree.
2. Puree all or part of the soup in a blender or food processor. You'll probably need to do this in batches. Return to the puree to the pot. (If you have a blender wand, use it right in the pot instead of transferring soup around the kitchen). Stir in the milk. Don't boil again after adding milk – milk will scald and taste funny. (If you heat up leftover soup, heat to just below boiling for the same reason.)
3. Add black pepper to taste, and adjust salt as necessary. Serve hot or cold, topped with a generous sprinkle of fresh herbs

Yield: about 6 servings

You can make this soup as creamy smooth or chunky as you like – just puree more or less.

Notes: If you prefer, you can caramelize the leeks beforehand: slice thinly into rounds, and sauté over low heat in a mix of butter and olive oil in a skillet or frying pan. Keep stirring periodically until they start to brown, but not burn (sometimes up to 15 min). Remove from heat, save til you need them. Try sautéing thyme, black pepper, and/or dried parsley with the leeks while caramelizing. Another variation: Roast the potatoes beforehand; this also gives a sweeter, deeper flavor to the soup. Cut into chunks, douse with olive oil or butter, and roast in the oven til well-browned on the edges and soft inside (this also reduces soup cooking time).

Roasted Roots: the ubiquitous winter peasant farmer food—super simple, super satisfying, super yummy

A bunch of root veggies – your choice; whatever's available: potatoes, radishes, carrots, onions, sweet potatoes, beets, turnips, rutabagas, garlic, parsnips, celeriac, ginger, did I miss anything? Whatever you like....Try apples or pears, too...

Lemon juice or cider vinegar

Olive oil

Salt and Pepper

Optional dried herbs: rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano, etc. --your choice

Preheat oven to 375. Clean and cut all roots into bite-sized chunks (maybe smaller for ginger; just peel garlic cloves, don't cut them). Don't bother peeling unless you enjoy peeling (who are you?). Toss all root chunks in a big bowl with enough lemon juice or cider vinegar to coat everything. Then add the olive oil, salt, and pepper, and keep tossing til everyone is thoroughly doused. Spread one single layer deep on a big cookie sheet or in lasagna dishes (whatever you've got that can go in the oven with a single layer of roots on it). Cook for about 45 min, or until most roots are browned and starting to crisp on the edges (time depends on size of chunks) – this will give a yummy sweet flavor and chewy texture, or you can cook less time, just until they're soft inside and golden outside. Your choice. Stir and turn once or twice during cooking. Serve hot, immediately.

If you're feeling fancy, serve with a hot Bechamel sauce. If not, enjoy!

These can also be refrigerated, re-dressed with a little more oil and vinegar and fresh rosemary, and served as a cold root salad the next day.

Raw twist: The same exact recipe (except perhaps potatoes) can be enjoyed *without cooking*. Just cut chunks very small, and marinate with dressing longer – or shred or grate everything before tossing with dressing. Add pecans, almonds, and/or sesame seeds to top it off. This variation will be more pungent, especially if your root mix is heavy on turnips, radishes, onions, garlic, or rutabagas—so add a little more salt, acid (lemon/vinegar) and/or sweetener (honey, maple, sugar, date sugar) if you like.

Note on pungent veggies: If you find your tolerance level for pungent root veggies being pushed to the limit this winter, try rotating Roasted Roots into your normal repertoire of winter dishes – Roasted Radishes on their own, for example, are a surprisingly yummy new way to enjoy radishes. Try each root veggie alone, mixed with one or two things, and once in a while, throw everyone in together, as described above. Use leftovers in soups, chowders, shepherd's pie, risotto, or as a cold salad the following day.

That's it – thanks for reading; have a wonderfully crunchy crisp fall week. -MF