



Sogn Valley Farm

CSA Newsletter Oct. 10-11, 2017

www.sognvalleyfarm.com

Greetings,

Welcome to the first week of the fall CSA. For first-time members, this newsletter will accompany each box in paper form, and will also be posted in the Newsletter Archives on our website for later referral.

As I write this, my wireless thermometer reads 34°, meaning it's our coldest morning so far this fall and we may see some patchy frost hitting low-lying areas of the field. Am I worried about it? Not terribly. It's October 10th and, in an average year, we should have gotten this cold two weeks ago. The vast majority of the crops in the field will be completely unaffected by a light frost. Those that are frost-tender are either about dead already (tomatoes), just about to be mass harvested (sweet potatoes), or likely to have only the upper leaves singed but the fruit be unaffected (peppers, eggplant).

Many cool-season crops, like carrots, broccoli, cabbage, and spinach, will actually improve with frost, as freezing temperatures encourage sugar production within the plant, thus lowering the freezing point of cytosol (the fluid inside the cells which comprise the plant) in the same way salt reduces the freezing point of water, keeping our sidewalks and roads ice-free in the winter. As I have joked in a previous newsletter, let's be thankful plants evolved to protect themselves from freezing by producing sugar, not salt!

Cold isn't the only weather adversity we're dealing with—last Friday and Saturday left us with 3.5 inches of rain, which is significant because we were about to harvest our sweet potatoes. Since we use a tractor-drawn implement to loosen up the tubers before hand-harvest, we now need to wait for the soil to dry out. And soil doesn't dry out nearly as fast in 65° days with 11 hours of daylight as it did with 85° days with 16 hours of daylight.

We're hoping that by Wednesday or Thursday we'll be able to start sweet potato harvest. It's one of the more labor intensive harvests we do. First, we need to remove the vines, which requires a combination of mowing and subsequent hand pruning of the lowest-growing vines that were too low for the mower to clip. We also must remove the plastic mulch used to warm the soil

What's in the box?

Romanesco cauliflower: This mesmerizing vegetable is a specialty cauliflower described as somewhat sweeter and nuttier than typical cauliflower. Try roasting it with garlic or steaming it and dressing with a balsamic reduction.

Savoy cabbage: This is the most tender cabbage we grow and is tasty in slaws, salads, and stir-fries. It requires less cooking than red or green cabbage. Store in a plastic bag in the fridge to reduce desiccation. Savoy does not store as long as green or red cabbage.

Spinach: We love spinach because it's a tender, nutrient-packed green that is great raw and easy to throw into scrambled eggs or other dishes that need a little green. As usual, this spinach has been double washed and should be ready to eat right out of the bag.

Carrots: At long last, we've started to harvest some of our fall carrots. This are young and slender, not like the fat storage carrots we had last fall (and will hopefully have after a few weeks of cooperative weather). These have thin skins that should not need to be peeled.

Tomatoes: Very likely the last of the tomatoes. The plants have pretty much given up the ghost and all that remain are a few half-ripe fruits scattered sparsely throughout the field. You are receiving a modest portion of heirlooms, red slicers, and/or orange slicers. Due to cool temperatures recently, some (but not all) of these are a bit under-ripe and could probably use a couple more days to ripen on your counter.

Red and green bell peppers: Toss these into a stir-fry with carrots, eggplant, onion, garlic, and savoy cabbage.

Eggplant: Cut into thick slabs for eggplant parmesan, or opt for ratatouille, baba gannoush, or stir-fry. This late in the year eggplant may have somewhat more prominent seeds in the bulbous end of the fruit — I rarely notice this when I eat them. Eggplant prefers to be stored at high humidity and moderate temperature (~50-55°F), but the best option for the home is probably in a plastic bag in the crisper.

Gold potatoes: Gold potatoes are great for mashing, roasting, and for soups and chowders. Peel if you like, or keep the skin on to retain more vitamins and minerals.

Yellow onions: Seems like onions make their way into most of our winter meals, and yellows are all-purpose, long-storing onions.

Garlic: Ditto to the onions. Fall meals are made better with garlic. Mince or press and let it sit for ~15 minutes before cooking to trigger an enzymatic reaction that increases the healthy compounds in garlic.

On Deck

Each week, we'll give some hints about what new items may show up CSA shares in the next 1-2 weeks. Please note, this is not a guarantee, but our attempt to give you an idea of what's coming up.

Delicata squash — Jalapeño peppers — Scallions — Watermelon — Broccoli

for this heat-loving southern crop. Once the mulch and drip irrigation tubing are out, we can then “undercut” the plants with tractor-drawn, horizontal steel blades that sever the base of the tubers from the soil and loosen them. Next, we pull the sweet potatoes out of the soil by hand, sort out the culls (most commonly with some rodent chewing damage), and transfer them into boxes. These boxes get brought into a greenhouse to cure, a process which heals wound incurred in harvest, thickens the skin, and induces a chemical conversion of starches to sugars within the tubers. Conditions for curing are high temperature (~85°) and high humidity (~85%) for 5-7 days. Once that is complete, they are stored at 55-60° until they are washed and put in CSA boxes. So as you can see, we have a bit of work ahead of us...

Here’s to good drying weather in the coming days!

Have a good week,

–Dana

Stir-Fry Basics

Our friends Ben Doherty and Erin Johnson of Open Hands Farm provided their CSA members a nice tutorial on stir-frying, which was adapted from the Enchanted Broccoli Forest cookbook. This is more of a “teach you to fish” than a “give you a fish” kind of recipe. You should be able to use it for the many stir-fryable veggies in this week’s box, along with those in subsequent boxes.

Basic trick of stir-frying: group vegetables, after they are cut, according to their respective cooking times, so that none will over- or under-cook. You can accomplish this by adding slower-cooking vegetables to the wok/skillet earlier than the quicker-cooking ones.

Heat the wok/skillet alone first, for up to a minute. Then add a little oil (olive or peanut), and if you are using onions (1/2 cup per serving) and garlic (1 clove per serving), add them now and sauté them alone first. If you are using tofu, add this next along with about 1 or 2 Tbsp of tamari (you can add more while sautéing the vegetables, if you’d like). Then add whatever “group 1” vegetables you are using, and sauté until partially done. Next, add “group 2” items and cook until everything is almost done. Selections from “group 3” come in at the very end, just before you take it off the burner.

Group 1—potatoes (sliced thinly), celery, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage (red/green), eggplant, asparagus (if thick)

Group 2—Kale, collards, savoy cabbage, mushrooms, peppers, zucchini, summer squash, asparagus (if thin)

Group 3—Most Asian greens, scallions, bean sprouts

You don’t have to use ALL of these vegetables. You can use just use some, or even just one. Plan on about ¾-1 lb per serving.

The more thinly a vegetable is sliced, the quicker it cooks. Basic goal: To cook the vegetables quickly (over high heat, stirring almost constantly) so that each vegetable is done to its own individual perfection.

Have all vegetables cut up beforehand, so you can stir constantly and work quickly once the wok/skillet is hot.

Extras to add to your stir-fry—add any, all, or none of these in the last minutes of cooking

Chopped, toasted nuts

Sliced water chestnuts

Cooked noodles (rinsed and drizzled with sesame oil)

Toasted sesame seeds

Soaked, sliced black mushrooms

Seasonings—to be added towards the end of cooking (all amounts can vary according to taste)

Wine—1 Tbsp

Tamari—1 to 2 Tbsp

Grated ginger—1 Tbsp

Crushed red pepper—to taste

Toasted sesame oil—1 Tbsp

Cilantro—1/4 cup

Coconut milk—1 can (if you use this, then you can add a curry powder or paste and it will become more of a Thai dish than a Chinese dish)

Experiment and have fun!

Recipe source: <https://openhandsfarm.com/recipes-2/multi-vegetable-recipes/>