

Journey School Food Community CSA Newsletter Week Thirty-Three: September 1, 2007

When asked recently about the greatest challenge of growing in this area, I had to answer "Climate Change". It isn't the wet or the cold or the length of the growing season - it's not knowing which one of them will be affecting the garden this week. I grew up in the Columbia Gorge, Jeff grew up in the Willamette Valley, and we have lived in the Puget Sound area for ten years now. There were certain truths about our weather here. 1) It's fairly mild - very few days of extreme hot or extreme cold. 2) It's fairly even - very few days with huge temperature swings from very cold to very hot. 3) While it rains a lot, it is usually lightly enough that you can still work in it if you must. 4) Even in the worst rain months, there are usually enough dry days mixed in to maintain soil structure and sanity!

This year, I felt like the weather patterns were on a multiple season cycle - within almost every month, we've had unusually warm, unusually cold, unusually wet, unusually dry, record rainfall, record winds, and record temperatures. Here at Plain Old Farm, our zucchini decided last week that it must be Winter and simply stopped producing. Can you believe it? Have you ever heard a farmer complain about not having enough Summer Squash? On the other hand, do you remember when all our greens bolted in March? Many plants are guided by day length in determining their reproductive cycle. With the repetitive cycle of grey wet days and bright sunny days, the plants didn't know whether to send energy to vegetation, to fruit, or to seed. Both the dill and the cilantro grew to about 12 inches tall and then went to seed without ever really leafing out. Our storage onions are bolting as if entering their second Spring. Some of the plants, such as the green, yellow, and burgundy beans, just gave up.

On the other hand, we are going to have cucumbers coming out of our ears soon. And speaking of ears, the beans growing on the cornstalks in the winter squash field are just beginning to flower. I have never, ever, grown so much basil and the bees have had a consistent supply of flowers in which to trip around. While we have greatly missed the abundance of berries this year, we have been glad for our disconnection from the grief of seeing gallons of berries rot in the rain. We've watched the melon house with hungry hawk eyes, managing the temperature closely, and I think we've got a chance of juicy sweet fruit by the end of this month. Unless.....

Good luck to all of you starting classes next week. Our homeschooling hearts will be thinking of you!

Please come to our Picnic next Friday, September 7th. Bring a dish to share, something to drink and your own dishes. We'll begin about 5:00 and end when we are done!

I've never been a big fan of bell peppers. I'm pretty sure one of my Midwest relatives forced me to eat stuffed bell peppers when I was a kid. Yech. When Jeff made salsa this weekend, he roasted the peppers first. What a difference! I can't wait for the last pepper harvest so I can roast and then pickle them. I'm working on a list of all the recipes to which I want to add this tasty new treat.

Roasting peppers is very easy. We have a propane stove but I think an electric would do as well. Just place the pepper in the oven, near the flame (or element) on Broil. Turn the pepper as the skin blisters and blackens. When the entire pepper is roasted, remove it from the oven and place it in a paper bag for about ten minutes. Then, gently remove the skin using your fingers or a fork. Slice the pepper in half starting from the bottom and cutting to within about 1 ½ inches from the top. Discard the stem and seeds. You can then chop the sweeter, tender pepper for use in recipes (like our family favorite Superior Cornbread below) or leave whole and use for pickling.

Superior Cornbread

2 1/3 cups flour
1 cup corn meal
1 cup sugar
2 teaspoons salt
4 ^o teaspoons baking powder
3 eggs, beaten
2/3 cup melted butter
1 2/3 cups milk

Blend dry ingredients in a bowl. In a second bowl, blend wet ingredients. Pour wet ingredients into dry and mix well. Add chopped roasted pepper and stir gently. Pour into greased 13x9x2 inch pan and cook for 25-30 minutes at 400 degrees.

Beet Green Gratin

12 ounces sliced mushrooms
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 pound beet greens, cleaned and picked (Use the leaves of beets, mustard, and Pac Choi)
Kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper
4 egg yolks, beaten
1 cups ricotta
1/2 cup grated Parmesan
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup crumbled crackers

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the mushrooms and garlic and sweat. Add the mixed greens and mix well. Remove pan from heat. Season with salt and pepper.

In a separate bowl, combine the egg yolks, ricotta, Parmesan cheese, and salt. Combine everything and put into a lightly oiled 9 by 11-inch baking dish. Top with the crumbled crackers and bake for 30 minutes covered. Uncover and bake for an additional 15 minutes.