

CSA Newsletter

WALTHAM FIELDS COMMUNITY FARM

A project of Community Farms Outreach

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Notes from the Field

by John Mitchell, Farm Manager

Basil Culture

I received some comments from somebody at the Sunday CSA pickup that thought that a great deal of basil had gone to seed last season. It was a great opportunity to educate someone about the culture of basil, and I thought I would share the information with the larger CSA membership.

We begin our basil in the greenhouse in the spring, and try to keep it producing a crop throughout the summer. The basil attempts to finish its life-cycle by producing seed, and the farmer pinches off the new leaves and shoots to harvest a crop and to prevent the basil from going to seed. As long as the plant has not set seed, it will continue to vigorously produce new leaves and shoots.

With each crop that comes off the plant however, the next leaves and shoots are smaller and the attempt to set seed comes sooner. The plants also deteriorate with age. Ultimately, the basil will not be frustrated in its effort to reproduce, and the last shoots will produce leaves so small that they are unworthy of harvest and begin immediately sending up seed spikes.

At that point, we will usually open up the basil beds to the CSA for gleaning pick-your-own, as the older leaves are still useful for pesto. What you are seeing there are plants that are at the end of their life-cycle, and if we weren't opening them to you for gleaning we would mow them down.

This year there are two new things happening with basil. We experimented with a mix of specialty varieties of basil (Thai, lemon, purple, cinnamon), and are experimenting with a different harvest technique that farmhand Ellen Gray had experience with from previous farms she has worked at.

Ultimately, the basil will not be frustrated in its effort to reproduce...

There is wide variation in the vigor of the specialty mix—especially of the purple varieties in this mix—so I have been delaying the opening of the mixed basil bed to the CSA until some of the struggling varieties catch up.

With the new harvest technique, we direct seed the basil and then cut it off at the base when the plant is about 6 inches high. The crop is distributed to the CSA in bunches. The first harvests have been very successful, though one bed only allowed us to distribute to two pickups (Tuesday and Thursday). Sunday got the entire harvest from the beds that we are doing with the same culture from last season, so no pickup was shorted.

I intend to integrate this new technique into the crop plan for future seasons, while continuing with the greenhouse starting method as well because it allows me to get basil to the CSA sooner. Thank you Ellen for the new ideas.

Row cover rollup

Farmhand Jonathan Kirschner has also been bringing us some new ideas. He has been working on a project in front of hoophouse to invent a device to roll white floating row cover onto. Jonathan is creating his prototype mostly from recycled materials like the large cable reels used by the phone company. Jonathan is also responsible for the blue barrels in the hoophouse and inside the main building for recycling cans and bottles.

Thank you Jonathan.

DISTRIBUTION WEEK: 9
August 3-7, 2003

What's in the Share or Coming Soon:

Tomatoes
Arugula
Mustard Greens
More Eggplant
Cantaloupes

Pick-Your Own this week:

Basil mix
Dill
Cherry Tomatoes
(some pickups)

Recipes

Fennel, Bean and Pasta Salad – *From Asparagus to Zucchini cookbook*

Ingredients:

Fennel bulbs, leafy tops removed and reserved
1 small onion
Olive oil
1 can (28 oz.) Kidney beans, drained
2–3 cups cooked pasta
1 teaspoon lemon pepper

Directions:

Thinly slice fennel bulbs and onion; sauté in olive oil.

Chop reserved fennel tops and add to cooked mixture with remaining ingredients.

Serve chilled.

Makes 4–6 servings.

Veggie Pizza

Submitted by Kristi Swanson, AmeriCorps NCCC

Ingredients:

1 tube croissant rolls
1/4 cup mayonnaise
1/2 package Hidden Valley dressing (dry)
1 8 oz. package cream cheese
Veggies—use any
carrots
onions
cauliflower
radishes
broccoli
tomatoes
mushrooms
cucumber

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 F.

Spread croissant roll dough all over pizza pan or cookie sheet.
Bake for 10–15 minutes.

Mix 1 8 oz. package cream cheese, 1/4 cup
mayonnaise, 1/2 package Hidden Valley dressing (dry mix).

Once pizza crusts are done baking, let it cool for at least two
minutes, then spread the cream cheese mixture on it.

Chop up any vegetables and put them on the pizza.

Ready to serve.

Purslane

Thanks to Marina, a longtime volunteer at the farm who lives half the year in Greece when she is not helping us farm here, for suggesting and advocating for new things.

One suggestion that Marina has made that I am experimenting with is **wild-harvesting purslane**—bunches have appeared in the share this week. Purslane grows as a weed in our fields, and now is the time of the season when it is young and tender and has not yet gone to seed.

Purslane is reputed to be a very good source of Omega-3 fatty acids. It is good in salads, steamed or in soups and stews.

Please let me know if you value the presence of purslane in the share.

---John Mitchell, Farm Manager

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WFCF Art Exhibit: We're looking for CFO members and shareholders who are interested in putting together an exhibit of farm pictures, children's art work, any type of 'art' that represents or is inspired by our farm. The work could be exhibited at our Annual Meeting (Nov. 16) and 2004 Spring Fling. Who knows, maybe this exhibit could travel to area coffee houses, churches, even some of the food programs that receive our vegetables. If you're interested, contact Board@communityfarms.org

Wanted for AmeriCorps: Bicycles

The farm's AmeriCorps guests have no transportation around town other than a 15-passenger van and their feet. If any CSA members have an old, safe bike that could be borrowed for the AmeriCorps helpers during their 8-week stay, it would be appreciated. Please contact the farm manager at johnmitchell@communityfarms.org.
Thank You

Fruit Shares: We have decided to sell Fruit Shares until Tuesday August 19th (payments must be received by this date). \$58 per fruit share. Cheers, Derek

Fruit Share Ride Shares: If anyone is interested in a fruit share, but doesn't want to go out to the farm each week (or doesn't own a car), I'm coordinating a "Fruit share ride share." If you want to make fewer trips and drop some fruit of at someone else's house (particularly in Cambridge) let me know. ---Jeff Sciortino (jj_sciortino@yahoo.com 617-547-6022)

Note: Thanks to the CSA for giving me a chance to guest edit the Newsletter this week. ---Jeff Sciortino