

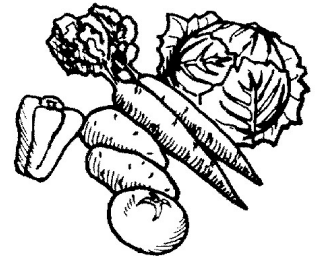
CSA Newsletter

WALTHAM FIELDS COMMUNITY FARM

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE 1995–2005

A project of Community Farms Outreach

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Notes from the Field

How are things growing? That's the question that many of you asked us at the first CSA distribution this year. The answer, of course, varies from week to week and hour to hour, and if you ask Matthew, he'll say 'farmers are never satisfied with the weather.' It's true—but this year has been a tricky one for all of us farmers, from the pollyannas to the curmudgeons. So here's the short answer: some things are growing well, some not so well. As usual.

And here's the long answer: our cold, wet May was tough on many of our warm-season crops, like beans, tomatoes, pumpkins, and cucumbers. Many of them had cold- or cold-water-related injuries or disease, and many are simply set back. Our potatoes, planted the first week of May, are usually ready for hilling around this time, but this year some varieties are just showing their first leaves. Even the cool-weather crops, like peas and lettuce, have been growing slowly and are a little behind where they usually are at this point in the season. I've heard the same from other farmers—some have lost many of their transplants, while some are delaying their first harvests.

The additional challenge, of course, is that pests and weeds are more resilient than our crop plants to a large degree. They respond well to periods of good weather and seem to simply wait out the worse stretches. The combination of a cool and wet May followed by a very hot first week of June means that we have had to deal with spring pests like grubs and cabbage root maggot for longer than usual, followed immediately by summer pests like cucumber and potato beetles in large numbers. When you combine this with the stressed-out crop plants, you end up with a situation where all we can do, in some cases, is hope for the crops to overcome their adversities.

This isn't such a big deal for many of the summer crops, like cucumbers, summer squash, and beans, which are planted in ongoing successions. If one succession is hit particularly hard by a spell of weather or an unfortunate interaction with the life cycle of a pest, we can move on to the next planting with relative ease. It may mean that we have a gap in

June 12–16, 2005 (Week #2)

the harvest of these crops, but in general we won't be faced with an overall crop failure. Where things are more challenging is with long-season crops, like parsnips, potatoes, winter squash and pumpkins, or tomatoes, where we have a limited window of time in which to plant in order to get a crop. We get one or two chances to get them successfully in the ground, not five or six, as is the case with some of the shorter-season crops. This makes it more likely that we can have a crop failure with crops like these.

The other issue we face on a daily basis is triage—when there are challenges, which are the most urgent? When we can't tackle them all, which do we take on? Some of the answers to these questions depend on the popularity of the crop with our shareholders and how much space it takes up on the farm—how much soil and sunlight and person-power we have invested in the crop. For example, we're much more likely to put working on the very serious potato beetle issue in our half-acre of potatoes higher on our priority list than hand-weeding the four beds of parsnips. We make dozens of these decisions every day, especially during this most challenging month of our season. June is when we begin to harvest, continue to plant, and deal with the fastest-growing weeds and the fastest-acting insect pests. The next three weeks will be among the longest and hardest of our year. Please help us keep in mind what it's all about!

Amanda Cather

Family Farm Day June 19th

Sunday, June 19th, is a family day at the farm. Family-friendly farming tasks include planting melons, weeding and mulching strawberries. Meet at the distribution shelter at 1:30. The **3rd Sunday Gathering** begins at 4:00 PM. Farm staff will give a report on farm conditions around 4:30. Families of all ages welcome, rain or shine!

'Scuse Me While I Kiss This Pie

(or, What To Do With CSA Rhubarb)

by Christine N. Davis, first-time CSA shareholder

The blackboard at the community farm on Sunday said, "Rhubarb—get it while you can!" So I did -even though I'd never cooked with rhubarb before. I selected six long pinkish-green stalks, estimated I had about a pound total (actually 1-1/4 lbs.), and added them to my grocery bag. I was thinking of the sweet strawberry-rhubarb compote my mom used to make, but when my husband saw the rhubarb and mentioned the pie his mom used to make, I thought I'd try my hand.

There are several things not to do when baking a pie. Don't choose a warm evening to mix and roll out the dough. Don't jump up every ten minutes to watch Hell's Kitchen on Fox. And don't neglect to read the directions all the way through. I was following two sets of directions: the basic pie crust recipe from *Baking Illustrated* and the rhubarb pie recipe from *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook*. If I'd read the latter all the way through, I would have seen that it recommended a lattice crust for the pie, and I would have followed *Baking Illustrated's* directions for making one of those. (Or, honestly, I probably would have ditched the pie idea and called my mom for that compote recipe.)

For all that, it was kind of fun putting the whole thing together, even if what I came up with was one of the clumsiest looking lattice-top pies ever baked by a so-called adult. I don't have much experience rolling pie dough, and the lattice was a first for me. The pie's edge got too dark in the oven (let's not even talk about my lack of pie-edge-crimping talent, thanks). But the flavor was actually very intriguing and satisfying.

Raw rhubarb is stiffer than celery, and it's sour. Toss it with sugar and bake it and it's still acidic, but also sweet and soft. So with each bite you get this melting sweet-and-sour half-veggie-half-fruit flavor, plus the flakiness of whatever pie crust you attempted. I can see why you might want to combine rhubarb with strawberries or apples to cut some of the acid tanginess. All in all, though, it does make me want to try cooking with rhubarb again sometime. Even my husband says he's eager to see Christine's Rhubarb Pie #2. And if it weren't for the CSA, I doubt I ever would have thought about cooking with rhubarb on my own.

Cranberry-Glazed Radishes

from *Vegetables from Amaranth to Zucchini*, by Elizabeth Schneider

3/4 cup cranberry juice
1 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
1/8 tsp ground allspice or cloves
1/8 tsp pepper
1/2 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp hazelnut, walnut, or olive oil
2 or 3 bunches radishes

Combine everything except radishes in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Meanwhile, trim and wash radishes. Add radishes to liquid, bring to a boil, and cover. Simmer until tender. When tender, uncover and simmer 5 minutes to reduce liquid to a glaze, stirring or shaking often as it gets sticky. Serve hot

Good as a sweet-and-sour accompaniment to turkey, chicken, or salmon.

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