



News from Provident Organic Farm



www.providentfarm.org

Season 2, Week 35

"dedicated to a safe, just and sustainable food system"

Dec. 8th, 2003

NOTES FROM THE FIELD #35...

Most of what is happening on and off the farm now is directed toward next year. I have built a hot bed in the passive greenhouse to germinate seeds for next year's crops. A hot bed is an enclosed compost pile that generates heat during the digestion process. Because it is enclosed, most of the heat generated is directed upward and passes through the seeded trays before it escapes. I built it with shredded leaves and fresh horse manure layered into a cement block "box" in the corner of the passive greenhouse. It is large enough to hold 4 of the metal trays I use to start seeds. I have placed a tray of soil in the hot bed and another on the floor of the greenhouse to monitor the difference in soil temperature. Three days after I built the pile, the soil temperature in the hot bed tray was 12 degrees warmer than the tray on the floor. This differential has been consistent even on cloudy days when there is no solar gain in the greenhouse. The fluctuation of soil temperature is also less in the hot bed tray. The first crop to go in the hot bed will be leeks. In a heated greenhouse, leeks are started in mid-January and take about 11 weeks to grow to transplant size. Because everything is slower in a passive system, I will sow the seeds this week. I am not sure how long they will take to get to transplant size, but hope an additional month will be sufficient. After the leeks germinate and can withstand the colder temperatures outside the hot bed, I will germinate the onions in the hotbed. By mid-January I hope to have the leeks and onions germinated and be able to sow the early spring transplants for field crops and the tomatoes that will go in the passive greenhouse.

As most of you know, I was in the greenhouse business for 16 years before starting the CSA. I have grown millions of transplants in a heated greenhouse system, but this hot bed system is new to me. I am excited about the potential. In all those years of growing millions of transplants, watching seeds pop through the soil always amazed me. The powerful force of a seed breaking ground is an awesome event to witness.

Much less exciting and not nearly as much fun, but equally important to the future of the CSA is developing a business plan. Stevik, Susie, Pat, Amy, Memo and I have been working on this plan for the CSA. For the past 2 years we have been flying by the seat of our pants, so to speak. With a well thought out plan, we will be able to accomplish the larger goals of the CSA. During the 16 years, Kathy and I ran the greenhouse business, we were one of a very small group of organic farms in the Mid-Atlantic area that derived its entire income from the farm. It was a no frills ride, but it was a choice we made so that we could raise our kids and not have to "hire out" the most important job we had. I guess because we were able to sustain our family on a meager farm income, I was asked to speak about how we pulled it off at a couple of conferences. The first thing I would say was that in any sustainable farming operation the first thing that must be sustained is the farmer. Regardless of how great a plan you develop, if it is not profitable, you won't be able to do it again, and if you do you are just digging a hole to bury yourself.

This year, under perhaps the worst of conditions, you have sustained my family. In any other farming model, I would have been digging a hole for us all. I am acutely aware that the CSA has not lived up to the expectations of some of the members, but I don't feel the need to apologize for that. It would be extremely arrogant to apologize for the weather, as if I had any control. Considering last year's drought and this year's floods, the law of averages is with us for next year.

My predictions for next year: It will be sunny and mild all season long, with a light drizzle of compost tea falling from the sky every afternoon at about quitting time. All harmful insects will take the year off, along with diseases. Weed seeds will germinate, but then reconsider and drop dead providing a mulch for the crops. There will be no equipment breakdowns. Help will show up on time every day, excited to dive into the day's work and you will need a wheelbarrow to take home your shares.

Onward and looking forward to next year,
Jay

Turnip and Sweet Potato Soup

2 leeks
1 med onion, peeled and diced
4 tbsp unsalted butter
- salt and pepper
2-3 lb turnips with greens
2 russet potatoes
1 sm sweet potato
2 qt vegetables or chicken stock



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Remove the coarse outer leaves and dark green tops from the leeks; rinse thoroughly and dice. Sauté leeks and onions over medium heat in butter; cook until soft. Season with salt and pepper.

Trim greens from the turnips. Reserve some greens for garnish and use the rest for another meal. Peel and dice the turnips and potatoes. Add the turnips and potatoes to the onions and leeks and stew gently for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. Add stock and simmer until turnips and potatoes are fully cooked, about 15 minutes.

Puree in a blender or processor until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Wash the reserved turnip greens and chop roughly. Sauté over high heat in a teaspoon or two of butter until just wilted. Puree greens in a blender or processor. Serve soup warm with a spoonful of pureed greens in each bowl.

Serves 6

Prep Tips You can use any of Jay's turnips for this soup, but the pale, cream-colored variety are milder and will yield a gentle, luscious flavor.

Adapted from **Chez Panisse Vegetables**, Alice Waters, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1996.



update on fellow

CSA Member Jen Burkett:

For those who don't know, Jen Burkett was diagnosed with a brain tumor on the Sunday before Thanksgiving and had surgery the day after Thanksgiving. Jen has been released from Johns Hopkins, is staying with her sister and has started physical therapy. Said it will be a long road to recovery, but her spirits are good, joking with brothers and sisters.

COMMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

We welcome your comments and contributions, including recipes! Please send to ubuubok@dmv.com or Provident Organic Farm CSA, PO Box 62, Bivalve, MD 21814.

Food for Thought, Thought for Food

A study released by the Northwest Science and Environmental Policy Center titled "Impacts of Genetically Engineered Crops on Pesticide Use in the U.S.: The First Eight Years" proves the use of these crops is not all Monsanto hyped them to be. It draws on official data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on pesticide use.

On the 550 million acres of genetically engineered corn, soybeans and cotton there has been an increased use of pesticides by 50 million pounds. The first three years showed a decrease, but in the last three years there has been an increase by over 73 million pounds. Weed scientists had been concerned that heavy reliance on herbicide tolerant crops would trigger ecological changes that would incrementally erode the effectiveness of the technology over time. Apparently their concerns were valid.

In other studies, it has been proven that GE crops have lower yields than non GE crops. Farmers were willing to accept the lower yields because they were convinced (connived) that the reduced need for pesticides would offset the higher seed cost and reduced yield. Guess what guys!! You are now growing crops with higher input costs and reduced yields. Time to sharpen the pencil and use the other end on your purchase order for GE seed.