



Notes From The Field - Jay Martin, Provident Organic Farm

Thinking about Winter in the Dog Days of August

As Tina told you last week, August is a difficult month for farmers. We struggle with keeping our tempers below the misery index as we plant, tend, and harvest the crops in the high heat and humidity of summer. We are also in a race against time as we plant the fall crops. Our fall frost date in this zone is October 20th. Last year a killing frost came exactly on that day. I can remember years when we haven't had a killing frost until well after Thanksgiving. Mother Nature makes the rules in this game and we have to assume she may decide to kill off her tender crops in the middle of October. Most of the fall crops we grow won't be killed by a frost, but they are significantly slowed down as the days get shorter and with the cooler days of fall.

As a guide for our plantings, we can assume that for every day after August 15th that a crop goes in the ground, the relative maturity time for that crop increases by 2 days. If a 52-day cauliflower plant goes in the ground on August 20th, it will not be harvested before 62 days.

There is also a point in time when the crop will not mature in this growing season at all. Some of them can be over-wintered to harvest in the spring, such as carrots, kale, collards, spinach and leeks. Some can be planted to harvest all winter, too. I have been having fun playing with this planting schedule for years. I will never out-smart Mother Nature and know enough not to even try, but I find it fascinating trying to figure out what she will allow me to do. Eliot Coleman calls this farming the backside of the season. He is one of the masters of winter gardening in a passive greenhouse, cold frames and over-wintering crops. My personal goal as a grower for the CSA is to master growing during the

backside of the season. I have two reasons for this: The first one is to provide the members with year-round shares, the second is to have my "slack" season coincide with Kathy's teaching schedule so that after 30 blissed-out years of marriage we can take a vacation together. Hello, Nova Scotia in the summertime!!! We have a 25 acre farm there which we purchased in 1975. We have always considered it our "haven" in case the rest of the world blew or part of the ever-elusive retirement plan.

Toward the first goal, we have built a root cellar this summer. It is not yet complete, and will not be fully functional this year, but I am hoping we can grow the storage crops in needed quantities next year to stock it for the winter shares while we master the winter growing techniques. I have heard it said by farmers who offer year round shares with their storage and winter growing facilities that the limiting factor becomes the farmer, not the facilities. It's the burnout factor that starts in August.

Onward,
Jay

The Blight at the End Of The Tunnel

Your 2009 tomato crop: As you may know this has been a terrible year for growing tomatoes. We have heard reports of total losses from near and far due to late blight. Late blight can wipe out a crop very quickly and completely. I know all of us have been diligent in our efforts to protect our maters, but I also know they will be in short supply. Savor the flavor while they last.

JM

Techniques for Preserving the Harvest

By Kathy LaLiberte

Excerpted from Gardeners Supply Co. web page.

Peppers

To preserve peppers for winter stir-fries, salads and sandwiches, all you need is a little extra space in the back of your freezer or refrigerator. I preserve both sweet and hot peppers, and the methods described below work well for either type.

Just a note of caution: When you're working with hot peppers, make sure to wear a pair of rubber gloves. I

rarely wear garden gloves and never wear dishwashing gloves, but I learned the hard way that when it comes to hot peppers, gloves are a necessity. Several years ago I cored and sliced up a few pounds of hot peppers without wearing gloves and my hands burned for two days straight. Now I keep a special pair of gloves under the kitchen sink just for chopping hot peppers.

To Freeze Peppers: Halve sweet peppers (green, red, yellow or purple), remove the core and seeds, and slice into julienne strips or small 1/4" chunks. Pack them into a freezer bag, squeeze out the air and throw them in the freezer. That's it! Frozen peppers are best used in a dish that gets sauteed, such as a stir-fry, or added to onions and potatoes for a tasty omelet.

To Pickle Peppers: Prepare peppers as above. Fill a clean pint or quart jar to within an inch of the top with the chopped peppers. Pour in white vinegar to cover all peppers. Cover with a plastic lid if possible, as the vinegar will gradually corrode metal lids. Store the jar in the back of your refrigerator for up to 12 months. The peppers will stay crunchy for a few months but will gradually soften. Spoon them out of the jar as you need them. The vinegar is flavorful, too. My favorite pickled peppers are a colorful mix of yellow, orange and red Hungarian hot wax peppers. They're great on sandwiches or mixed into pasta and bean salads.

Tomatoes

Frozen tomatoes can't compare with those that have been canned. But if you don't have the time or equipment for canning, you can still put away some tomatoes to enjoy on a snowy evening when summer is just a memory. My neighbor freezes her tomatoes whole. She just sticks them in a plastic bag and throws them in the freezer. When you want some tomatoes for cooking, just hold a frozen tomato under running water and the skin slips right off. These work well in soups and sauces.

Beets and Carrots

If you can spare a crisper drawer, you can enjoy your homegrown beets and carrots until December or even January. After you pick the carrots, remove the green tops. For the beets, use a scissors to remove all but 1" of tops. Rub off loose soil but don't wash them or allow them to dry out. Put the carrots and beets into separate plastic bags and put the bags into a crisper drawer in your refrigerator. Don't seal the bags tightly. A little air circulation is good. Also, don't store near apples because they will cause the vegetables to soften. Check monthly.

Kathy LaLiberte has worked for Gardener's Supply since it began more than 25 years ago. For more see: <http://www.gardeners.com/Tips-for-Canning,-Freezing-and-Pickling/5387,default,pg.html>

In Your Share* This Week

Red Slicing Tomatoes

Heirloom Tomatoes

Peppers

Eggplant

String Beans

Squash

Choice of Watermelon or Cantelope

*Share makeup is best estimate at publication time.

Note: For preservation tips and additional recipes, visit the CSA website at <http://www.providentorganicfarm.com/>