



The Cedar Post

Cedar Down Farm's Weekly Newsletter

Summer CSA, Week 7, August 6, 2013

Each year, at some point in the season, I feel the need to talk about organic agriculture - perhaps because our organic inspector is coming in the next couple of weeks or because of a book I've been reading, I've been thinking about what it means to grow food organically and why it's important. When you're slogging away on the farm just getting things done, it's sometimes hard to keep sight of the bigger picture of why it's important to grow food the way we do.

Recently, I've been reading a book by a woman who grows gardens and teaches people about growing food in Chicago ("From the Ground Up" by Jeanne Nolan). In the book, she quotes some statistics about the amount of pesticide residue that is found on conventionally grown food that ends up being consumed by people. She states that there are currently 40 known carcinogens (that is, substances that are known to cause cancer) used as ingredients in pesticides that are approved by the U.S Environmental Protection Agency. And that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the average American currently has detectable levels of 237 chemicals from the environment in her body, including those frequently used in pesticides.

It's hard for me to fathom that the produce that I see in the grocery could be so inundated with chemicals and that people are eating these chemicals on a regular basis. Not to mention the exposure that agricultural workers are getting at a much higher level and the amount that is going into our ground and water.

At our farm, it is sometimes possible to feel like we are being inefficient because of how much more labour our type of farming requires and some of the things that we have to do to protect our crops from pests (primarily using lots of row cover and sometimes hand-picking bugs from plants). But, when I am reminded of how much more inefficient fossil fuel based agriculture is, I don't feel so bad. The conventional agriculture system is a significant contributor to climate change because it is based on the use of fossil fuels. Food alone accounts for 20 percent of the carbon footprint of the average American household (same for Canada, I'm sure). Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are manufactured using fossil fuels (American farmers use roughly 6.2 billion pounds of nitrogen-based fertilizers per year) and when applied to the soil they release nitrous oxide into the atmosphere (a greenhouse gas that has three hundred times the global warming impact as carbon dioxide).

On the flip side, organic agriculture - which does not use synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, actually contributes to a reduction in carbon dioxide into the atmosphere because organic soils actually capture and store carbon dioxide. The primary principle of organic agriculture is to build soil and that in turn can contribute to a reduction in the progress of climate change.

These are just a couple of considerations of the issues of conventional versus organic agriculture. But, when you spend so much of your time doing just one thing (in our case, farming), it is good to know that you are contributing positively to the world. Not to mention, feeding our community great food along the way!



This week's share:

Spinach, arugula, mustard greens, chard, carrots, sweet onions, zucchini, cucumber, eggplants, beans, herbs

Next week's guess:

Lettuce, zucchini, cucumber, beans, cipollini onions, carrots, tomatoes, garlic, herbs

Baghare Baingan (Eggplant Curry)

(Serves 4 as a side dish)

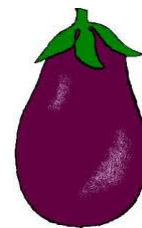
1 large eggplant
8 tablespoons vegetable oil
Salt, to taste
2 large onions, sliced
1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 garlic clove, crushed to a paste
1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and grated
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon garam masala (see Note)
4 tablespoons coconut cream or 1/2 cup
Coconut milk
Juice of 1/2 lemon
Rice or hot chapati, to serve

Cut the eggplants in half lengthwise, then cut each half into 1 inch pieces. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large frying pan over medium heat and cook the eggplant in batches for 4-5 minutes, or until golden brown, adding more oil as necessary. Season with salt. Set aside on a plate lined with paper towels.

Return the pan to the heat and add 3 tablespoons of the oil. Add onions and cook for 8-10 minutes, or until softened and brown. Add turmeric, garlic, ginger, chili powder, cumin and garam masala, and cook, stirring 1-2 minutes.

Add coconut cream or coconut milk with 2/3 cup water to make a sauce. Add lemon juice

and return eggplant to the pan. Cook on low-medium heat for 5-6 minutes or until oil floats on top or can be seen on the sides of the pan. Add more salt, if necessary. Serve accompanied by rice or hot chapati.



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Enchanting Eggplant...

Eggplant is lovely from start to finish. As a plant it is lush, with thick, gently furry leaves that have a purplish hue. The fruits hide under the leaves giving hints of amazing shades of purple and when you finally have one in your hands, you can't help but indulge in their sensual shape and amazing colour. It is unfortunate, given all of their attributes, that many people approach eggplant warily. Especially because the best thing about it is eating it!

It's true, eggplant doesn't give up its deliciousness as easily as say, a tomato, but if you treat it right, it is nothing short of spectacular. Prepared well, eggplant is rich and creamy, smoky and decadent. It can also be prepared many ways - it is to-die-for when you fry it, wonderful grilled or roasted, shines in a curry and can be baked whole and turned into a lovely purée. The thing to remember is that you want it very soft - undercooked eggplant is generally what gives people a bad impression of the fruit.

Here are some eggplant tips:

- freshly picked eggplants (like the ones you are getting) don't generally need salting. Salting removes bitterness that is mostly caused by time spent in cold storage in grocery stores. But, if you want to be sure that all possible bitterness is gone, salt cut up pieces of eggplant then let sit for 30 minutes. Liquid will bead on the surface and you can blot that off with a towel before cooking.
 - try to use them soon after you get them. They don't like refrigeration but if you do put them in the fridge, be sure to wrap them well so they don't wither.
 - don't worry if the flesh browns a bit after you cut into it, it will go away once cooked.
 - the eggplants that you receive don't need peeling.
 - To avoid the eggplant soaking up too much oil, brush the flesh of cut up eggplant with oil then broil or roast in a hot oven until golden brown - you can then use the roasted eggplant in your recipe and you will use much less oil.
- (Tips courtesy of "Vegetable Literacy" by Deborah Madison)

Baba Ganoush

Adapted from "Garden Fresh Meals" by Better Homes and Gardens

- 1 large eggplant
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp minced fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Halve the eggplant lengthwise and place, cut side down, on a baking sheet lined with foil. Prick skin all over with a fork. Bake about 25 minutes or until deflated and tender when pierced with a fork.

Scoop flesh from out of the eggplant halves and transfer to a blender or food processor. Add lemon juice, tahini, olive oil, garlic and salt. Process or blend until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and add parsley. Serve with toasted pita bread or crackers.

Griddled Eggplant Rounds

From "Vegetable Literacy by Deborah Madison"

Serves 4 to 6

Slice eggplant into rounds about 1/2 inch thick. Salt them if desired and let stand for 30 minutes to draw out moisture then blot them dry with a towel or paper towel. You can skip this because your eggplant will be really fresh!

When ready to cook, heat a ridged cast-iron pan or a heavy skillet pan over medium high heat. Allow it to get quite hot. While the pan heats, brush both sides of each eggplant slice with olive oil. Then add the slices to the hot pan and turn down the heat to medium. Cook for about 6 minutes then rotate the slices 45 degrees. Cook another 5 to 6 minutes. Then flip and cook the second side the same way. The second side and subsequent batches may need less time because the pan has amassed more heat.

When done, the surface will be nicely crossed-hatched or browned (if using a skillet) and feel tender. Remove finished slices to a plate and do the next batch. These keep well in the fridge for several days if well wrapped.

Try serving the slices with tahini, garlic and lemon juice. Top them with diced cucumber and lime juice (with basil, parsley or cilantro), serve them with ricotta cheese, basil and tomato or stuff them into a sandwich with some grilled zucchini, cheese and greens!



Orecchiette with Pesto and Green Beans

Serves 2

- 1lb of Orecchiette or other pasta shape
- 1/4lb green beans (trimmed)
- 1 tablespoon ricotta
- 2 cups of fresh basil leaves
- 1/2 cup of extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons of pine nuts
- 1 clove of garlic (peeled and lightly crushed)
- 1/2 teaspoon of salt
- 1/4 cup of grated pecorino cheese (a hard sheep's milk cheese)
- 1/2 cup of grated parmesan
- 2 tablespoons of butter (softened)



1. Put a large pot of salted water on to boil.
2. Blend the basil, pine nuts, oil, garlic and salt in a blender until smooth.
3. Transfer to a bowl and fold in the 2 cheeses and butter.
4. Add the orecchiette to the boiling water.
5. 5 minutes before the pasta is ready, add the green beans to the water.
6. Remove a cup of water from the pasta before draining.
7. Drain the pasta and beans and return to the pan.
8. Add the pesto and the ricotta and mix well.
9. You may need to add some of the reserved water if it feels to dry and bring to the table to rehydrate for seconds.