

THE TIPI TIMES

July 15, 2010, week 10 (purple EOW)

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THIS WEEK'S BOX CONTAINS:

Green beans, 1.5 lb
Snap OR snow peas, 0.6 lb
Celery
Italian frying peppers, 2
Collard greens
Lettuce
Zucchini/squash
Cucumbers, 2
Scallions
Walla Walla onion, 1

NEXT WEEK'S BOX WILL PROBABLY CONTAIN:*

Green beans, red or Savoy
cabbage, Walla Walla,
broccoli?, sweet corn?
and more

csa@tipiproduce.com

Please make sure you have entered csa@tipiproduce.com in the address book in your email program. It is a new address this year. We plan to use it more often. We will continue to use tipi@ticon.net, so do not delete that address yet.

FIELD DAY. We hosted a field day last week for farmers and for extension scientists from UW/Madison. These events are always interesting when a group of knowledgeable people attend. This field day was interesting for us as an indicator of a changing relationship in Wisconsin between the university and organic farmers. I attended graduate school in the early 1990s at UW/Madison, where I earned an MS degree in plant pathology. At that time, UW faculty in the agricultural departments were openly scornful of organic farming. The pioneering organic farmers of the time were equally disdainful of university efforts. There have been many changes in the intervening 20 years. Many older faculty members have retired. Those were the scientists most invested in chemical agriculture, a system they helped create and promote. The younger scientists seem more interested in "biological farming," ecological approaches to agriculture rather than strictly chemical ones. Organic farming is, of course, biological farming.

At the same time, the phenomenal success of Wisconsin's Organic Valley has proven that organic farming is a productive and stable way for farmers to earn a living. Organic Valley's dairy farmers have prospered during periods when conventional dairymen have struggled. Organic Valley's success caught the attention of many involved in conventional agriculture, especially because that success was achieved with little help from the university or extension. (A shining exception was the UW's Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, which facilitated learning about rotational grazing systems.)

The five UW scientists who attended our field day all have state-wide responsibilities with vegetable crops. The group included a plant pathologist, entomologist (disease and bug experts respectively), soil scientist, weed scientist and vegetable crops specialist, as well as a scientist whose mission is to work with organic farming systems. That's an excellent contingent. It's also a group unlikely to have attended an organic field day 20 years ago. Is it merely the result of younger, more open-minded faculty? Partially. Even more, it reflects organization on the part of organic farms.

Growers who can organize themselves are more likely to receive attention from university researchers. For example, there are multiple research programs at UW directly toward potato production, more than one would expect for the limited number of potato farms in the state. The potato growers have an organization that can articulate and argue for their needs, and they contribute funds toward research projects. Does that mean that the research scientists are following the path of least resistance? Maybe. Other funding sources do exist.

Our field day was organized by MACSAC, our farmer collective which promotes CSA in the Madison area. By inviting UW scientists to our farms, we can bring our production problems to their attention. We can introduce them to experienced vegetable farmers who may be potential collaborators. In discussions with several of the scientists, I discovered three common areas of interest: grafting watermelons to increase plant resistance to disease, no-till systems to reduce soil erosion, and an unusual leaf disease developing on our peppers. I am hopeful we'll work together on a few of these issues.

VEGGIE NOTES. Celery - Taste this celery alone. It is sweet because it is so fresh. Will store for two weeks or longer, so use a stalk at a time as needed.

Walla Walla onions - This is a sweet Vidalia-type onion, wonderful in salads. They will store for several weeks at room temperature or refrigerated. Uses: These onions are very sweet and mild, and are best eaten raw. You can cook them but they tend to melt away. Do not try to fry these onions! They contain too much water and simply will not fry. However, they will brown nicely on the grill or griddle. Don't overcook. You want them to still have some crunch.

Italian frying peppers (green, long, slender) - These sweet frying peppers are special. They contain less moisture than normal bell peppers, and therefore can be fried in a small amount of oil, preferably over high heat. They are unbelievably fragrant while cooking. If you attempt to fry normal bell peppers, they release juices and you end up sautéing them instead. They are also excellent eaten raw. Later in the season, we'll send red frying peppers as they ripen.

Scallions - These scallions are small and will need extra trimming on your part. We lost them in the weeds for a while and they did not grow to full size.

Zucchini - You will again receive either green zucchini, golden zucchini, yellow summer or patty pan squash.

MENU IDEAS Frying peppers, Walla Walla onions and zucchini can all be cooked on a grill or griddle. This weekend, I cooked all three on our griddle and used them to top cheesy polenta. I actually make cheesy grits (made with cornmeal) rather than true polenta (made with polenta meal). Other uses for grilled/griddled peppers, onions and squash: ♦ Serve with good Italian sausages and garlic bread. ♦ Use as pizza toppings.

♦ Mix into pasta salads. ♦ Tuck in pita bread with some crumbled feta cheese for an easy sandwich.

BIKE THE BARNS. Saturday, September 11. <http://www.macsac.org/bikethebarns/>

Bike the Barns is MACSAC's annual fundraiser. The money raised will subsidize CSA shares for low-income households through our Partner Shares program. You can register as a rider (\$65) or as a non-rider (\$30). This year, the route passes through Sassy Cow Creamery tours, Emerald Meadows Family Farm, Two Good Farms CSA, and JenEhr Family Farm. They are not coming to our farm this year. Call soon if you want to join the ride, as it sells out quickly.

HOW TO PAN-FRY ZUCCHINI. I've discovered the secrets of pan-frying zucchini and summer squash so that it browns nicely, which gives extra flavor to balance the squash's mild sweetness.

- Always use fresh squash. Every-other-week members, don't try this with zucchini you've hoarded from the previous week.
- A hot pan and hot oil are essential.
- Cook cubed squash in a single layer (more or less) in a heavy frying pan. Multiple layers in a pan will just steam without browning. That can be nice too, but it's a different dish. I can generally brown 2 to 2.5 lb. zucchini (three to four squash depending on size) in my 14-inch cast-iron skillet.
- Don't add any salt until the cooking is done. Salt will only draw moisture out of the squash so it ends up sautéing without browning.

1. Cut 2 to 2.5 lb. zucchini or summer squash into 1-inch cubes.
2. Heat a heavy 14-inch skillet until quite hot. Add 2 tsp. olive oil.
3. When the oil is hot, add the squash and toss to coat with the oil.
4. Let cook over high heat without stirring until browned. Turn with a spatula and continue browning on the other side. Turn again when necessary. Remove from heat when just fork-tender, about 8 to 10 minutes. Don't overcook.

Pan-fried zucchini and herbs (side dish)

Follow the recipe above. Add 5 cloves sliced garlic for the last 2 minutes of cooking. Dress with salt, pepper, 1 tsp. balsamic vinegar and finely sliced herbs (basil, parsley, dill or cilantro are good). Taste and add more vinegar if needed. You can add a handful of parmesan cheese if you wish.

Pasta with zucchini, ricotta and herbs

See our 7/1/10 newsletter. Basically, you follow the directions above, add garlic near the end of cooking time, then stir in ricotta cheese, herbs, parmesan cheese and some pasta cooking water. The recipe calls for tossing the mixture with pasta, but I love it as a side dish.