

THE TIPI TIMES

July 7, 2011, week 8 (green EOW)

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THIS WEEK'S BOX CONTAINS:

Swiss chard
Snap peas, about 1 lb
Snow peas, about 1/3 lb
The two types of peas are packed together in one bag.
Broccoli, about 0.9 lb
Zucchini/summer squash
Cucumbers, 2
Rhubarb, 1.2 lb
Basil
Garlic scapes

NEXT WEEK'S BOX WILL PROBABLY CONTAIN:*

Beets with greens, Walla Walla onions, zucchini, peas, cucumbers and more

*depending on weather, critters & other forces of nature.

I WISH FOR ...

It's been hot this week. Our workers know how to take care of themselves, but there are signs they need a pick-me-up. We have a sign on our bulletin board where they can notify us if we are running low on supplies. Here are the responses:

THINGS TO BUY

Band-aids
Candy
Peanut M&Ms
-- *Censored* --
More candy
Baby pool

I'll mix up another vat of lemonade tomorrow.

Rhubarb is NOT toxic this time of year. On Wisconsin Public Radio's Garden Talk last week, two horticulturists announced that gardeners should stop picking rhubarb because it becomes poisonous this time of year. "What?!" we thought. Neither Steve nor I have ever heard this before. We are friendly with the two scientists, Jim Nienhuis and Irwin Goldman. Steve and Irwin went to graduate school together and Jim brings his Costa Rican colleagues to our farm every summer for a tour. I did a little research without finding confirmation, then called them. Jim's response: "Irwin said that, not me! Ask him!" So I called Irwin, who said he'd intended to share these two messages:
1) It is time to stop harvesting so the rhubarb plants can replenish their root reserves for next season, and
2) The leaves will accumulate oxalates as the growing season progresses, and to be "cautious" with eating the rhubarb leaves.

"Does anyone eat the rhubarb leaves??" I asked. Irwin said that there have been cases of poisoning from rhubarb leaves during times when other vegetables were scarce. Apparently, it was suggested as a food during WWI, with disastrous results. We have no shortage of vegetables and have no intention of sending rhubarb leaves in the CSA boxes! The stems can also accumulate small amounts of oxalates as the season progresses, but Irwin says the younger stems that we harvest are safe. I did learn this interesting tidbit during my research: "Rhubarb is considered a fruit. In 1947 the U.S. Customs Court in Buffalo, New York ruled that rhubarb should be considered a fruit ... This ruling was a way for businesses to pay less tax on imported rhubarb since the tax rate for vegetables was higher than that for fruit." Nevermind that it's really a leaf petiole, it's officially a fruit.

Noisy Owls. I woke up around 3:30 a.m. last night. A juvenile great horned owl was perched on our barn, screeching loudly and begging for food. The parents must want this owlet to start hunting for its own food, as they did not deliver any snacks. I watched the owl on the barn peak, hoping to see it take flight. That's (usually) the best time to get a sense of its size. I turned away for a moment to get a sweatshirt, then turned back and ducked. The owl was flying directly at our bedroom window! It was a quick glimpse, but I could see that its wingspan was broader than our 33-inch window. The owl passed near our window, then settled on our roof to keep begging. I think the owl was flying by our window to see if I was good prey. I had opened the window a bit wider, coughed a few times, had apparently made enough noise to draw its attention. It was exciting to see an owl at such close quarters.

Great horned owls visit our farm frequently and we find they have habits. Last summer, one flew over our farm every evening at dusk, traveling northwest. It always flew over our barns, and its path would only vary by about 100 feet from day to day. I would wait near my flower gardens as the light faded, and it would glide by silently.

Another year, a juvenile roosted many nights in the pine tree outside our bedroom window. It would screech endlessly. Here's an audio clip, if you want to hear what the juvenile call sounds like. (<http://www.owlpages.com/owls.php?genus=Bubo&species=virginianus>, then choose 'Nocturnal Shriek' under Calls.) The audio clip is accurate but does not capture how loud they are. The pine tree is only 50 feet from our bedroom window. I lay awake thinking 'Someone feed that bird!' I tried banging on our window screen and went outside one night to whistle loudly. Our children were young and I couldn't make too much noise without waking them. I didn't want a shrieking owl and a shrieking toddler.

Steve found an enormous owl pellet earlier this week. Owls eat their prey, then cough out the indigestible bones and other parts a few hours later as a compact pellet. They are fascinating to dissect for clues to what the owl has eaten. Our son Ari carefully dissected the pellet, and decided the owl had eaten a bird, based on the hollow bones, one claw, a feather and some straggly down.

Owls are fascinating creatures and we are glad to have them living nearby. *Beth*

VEGGIE NOTES. We're taking a break from lettuce this week. Other ingredients in this box can be used for cold salads: cucumbers, snap peas, snow peas, broccoli, basil. This is another great week for creative stir-fries and sautees using zucchini, peas, chard, garlic scapes and basil.

Snap and snow peas - We've combined the two types of peas in one bag. The snap peas are fat, the snow peas are not. All need to have the strings removed.

Zucchini and summer squash - Wow, the squash field is really vigorous right now. You will receive either green zucchini, golden zucchini, yellow summer squash or patty pan squash.

Cucumbers - The first cucumbers of the year!

Swiss chard (large bundle of leaves) - This is a close relative of spinach, but requires longer cooking. Use as a substitute in any recipe that calls for spinach, just cook the chard a little longer.

Rhubarb - When chopped, this rhubarb will yield 3 to 4 cups.

Basil (stem with frilly green leaves) - This is the variety 'Napoletano.' It looks a bit different than most types of basil. This is our favorite variety because the it's leaves remain tender and flavorful even as the plants mature. Basil will blacken if stored in the refrigerator. It is best stored at room temperature, with the cut ends in water. You will receive either a bunch of individual basil stems or one sturdy branched stem. The branched stems may wilt if left intact, so cut off the individual stems and put them in water.

Garlic scapes (curly green things) - Use as a substitute for garlic cloves.

Steve's Rhubarb Pancakes

Do you need a night off from strenuous cooking? This is what we make. Steve's pancakes are hearty and filling, made with whole grains. Top with cottage cheese or yogurt. Combine with a simple salad and you've got a meal. You can always make a few pancakes without rhubarb for the picky eater(s).

1 cup cornmeal
1 cup wholewheat pastry flour
1/2 cup oat flour
2 Tbsp. baking powder

3 eggs
2 cups soy milk

Mix the dry ingredients. Mix the wet ingredients separately, then combine quickly. Add the pancake batter to a hot, oiled pan, then sprinkle with chopped rhubarb. Flip once and continue cooking. Serve with cottage cheese, yogurt and/or sliced fruit.