



LOON ORGANICS

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July 5, 2008

This Week's Box:

Baby Lettuce- Heads of baby red romaine. This is from our 2nd and last planting of head lettuce. You'll see salad mix from here on out.

Rainbow Swiss Chard- Now at its peak of beauty and quality!

Broccoli- From Gardens of Eagan.

Scallions- Also known as green onions. Mild onion flavor nice raw or cooked.

Sugar snap peas- snap off top and pull string off side. Whole pod is edible.

Summer Squash/Zucchini- A variety of zucchini and yellow summer squash. First of the year.

Cucumbers- First few picks of the year always have a few misshapen fruits, but they still taste great.

Baby Carrots- no need to peel

Baby Beets- beets and tops are edible. Use greens like swiss chard or spinach.

Basil- we put in a handful with your peas.

Cilantro- People often have a love/hate relationship with cilantro. The health benefits of fresh cilantro (it binds to and carries heavy metals out of the human body) may consider some to reconsider their disdain! Try a cilantro pesto.

We can never predict, but here's new produce we might have next week: green beans...

Week 3: July on farm = glorious

Happy 4th of July weekend! The fabulous weather made for a great day harvesting for our market and CSA. Vegetable farmers don't really get summer vacations or days off during the week—I say with no hint of bitterness, since we do get to spend the majority of our summers outside anyways and a killer tan (albeit a farmers tan) and fabulous food comes with the job. But we hope that you all also enjoyed a glorious day outdoors yesterday!

The crops on the farm this week are doing well, although we may have wished for just little bit more rain over last weekend. We got about a ¼ inch of rain, and it had been 11 days since the last noticeable precipitation. However, we always expect a dry spell in July. One of the rainiest times of the year should be late May/early June (although it was a bit extreme this year!) and then after the Summer Solstice passes the pattern usually changes over to a warmer, drier spell through July and early August. The blast of heat we had over the past weeks really speeded up the pace of plant growth along with our irrigation. Good thing we have irrigation. I'm not sure how we would farm without it—actually we wouldn't be able to farm without it since it is crucial to growing our tender salad mix, among other crops, all season long.

It is always interesting to compare plant growth from year to year, especially noting the old adage of knee-high sweet corn by the 4th of July. For those members with us last year, you might remember that the corn was *tassling* on the 4th of July last year and was harvested the 2nd week in July—one of the earliest harvests ever of sweet corn at Gardens of Eagan next to the '88 drought year where the first and last pick was on the 4th of July. For comparison, last summer at this time we had already had over 10 days above 90° and the soil was bone dry, so no wonder the crops were early and pushed forward by heat and water stress last season!

In other farm-related news, last Monday we had an inspection for our renewal of our organic certification. The organic inspector takes a look at all our fields to make sure we are doing what we said, and then there is a lengthy audit of our paperwork trail to track how each crop is grown and handled. This was our fourth year of certification, so we are used to how things work and actually enjoy getting to know our organic inspector—oftentimes they are local, organic farmers as well. The inspection went well, and our organic certificate should be on its way.

You too can appreciate the beauty of the farm and check out the growth of all the plants, either at our farm tour scheduled in the afternoon of Sunday, August 24 or let us know if you want to stop by some other time. The farm really is worth seeing.

What Laura would do with your box:

Here's where the glories of seasonal vegetable eating really begin. Not that the past couple weeks weren't great, boning up on salads, but I love the first tender servings of zucchini, carrots, and peas.

A favorite meal the past week: lightly steam or stir-fry sugar snap peas, carrots, green onions and zucchini for two minutes until everything turns a bright color, but still has a snap to it. Serve on a bed of soba noodles and drizzle with peanut sauce: melt peanut butter, soy sauce, honey, garlic, ginger, a bit of water, and some cayenne or chili pepper. We eat the peanut pasta with a salad of lettuce, cucumber, and a brown rice vinegar/toasted sesame oil/ soy sauce dressing. For a lunch or brunch, try whipping up a chilled soup with the cucumbers—butter milk cucumber or yogurt cucumber soup are both delicious topped with some fresh basil. Very refreshing after a hot day. My preferred preparation with cilantro is a raw pesto (same recipe as basil pesto) that is a dressing for your preferred protein source—animal or vegetable.

One CSA member confesses that she cooks greens, purees them, and slips them into baked goods, sauces, lasagna and soup. No one in the family notices... I'd love to hear what you do with your cooking greens—as long as you are not abandoning them in the back of your fridge. : (

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Recipe corner

We love beet salads—beets served on a bed of greens dressed with vinaigrette and an accompanying cheese. Our signature beet salad is on our website and is served with blue cheese, but the recipe below is a new twist. CSA member, Kate, tells us it is so good she ate it 4 times last week! The vinaigrette makes more than you need for one salad, so you can use it again and again...

Kate's Beet Salad

1 lb cooked beets, peeled, diced and chilled

5 shallots or green onions, diced and marinated in:

1/4 C Sherry vinegar, 1/4 C Water, 3 Tbs sugar, a pinch of salt- boiled then cooled.

1 C shaved Ricotta Salata (the hard kind!)...you could use feta too.

Greens or Spinach or Lettuce

Arrange beets, topped with marinated onions/shallots on the bed of greens and decorate with shaved ricotta. Dress with Sherry Vinaigrette:

1 clove minced garlic, or one stalk green garlic minced

1 minced shallot (or green onion, or skip)

1 sprig thyme or marjoram

salt and fresh pepper

1/4 C or more sherry vinegar

3/4 olive oil

3 Tbs water

We have found over the past couple years of operating our own CSA that cooking greens, Swiss Chard, Kales, Beet Greens, etc. are the most difficult item for members to want to eat regularly. They grow SO well in our climate that they can become nearly a weekly CSA staple, and yet cooking greens are essentially non-existent or grossly overcooked in typical Middle American cuisine (except maybe there are some cooking greens in that oh-so-famous lime green jello mold?). I guess that tells you how much our "traditional" fare has strayed from what actually grows well in our climate! At any rate, kales, collards, and broccoli are in the *Brassica* family of vegetables, and they have potent cancer-fighting properties. As in eating 3 servings per week (1 serving was 1 cup) reduced all types of cancer risk in individuals by 66% in a recent study!!! Swiss Chard and Beet Greens are just about as good as brassicas on the nutrition front, containing high levels of potassium, iron, Vitamins A,C,K, and on. I'll get down off my green soapbox soon, but just wanted to stress that it is imperative that we get our children to start eating more cooked greens along with us. Not an easy task I know, but if they eat them when they are young they will develop a taste for it and probably continue to eat it into adulthood. Try preparing greens a few different ways and see how you like it best (it helps if you serve them when everyone is REALLY hungry—you might be surprised at the taste then). In my book, one can never go wrong with a gratin—greens plus cheese, butter, and breadcrumbs equals tasty heaven. Try the gratin recipe from Alice Waters' [Chez Panisse Vegetables](#):

Chard Gratin

2 pounds rainbow chard (or other green)

1 clove garlic

3 Tablespoons unsalted butter

2 cups milk

2 Tablespoons flour

Whole nutmeg

3/4 cup Toasted Bread Crumbs

Preheat the oven to 375°. Wash the chard and cut off the thick ends of the stems.

Parboil the chard for 1 ½ minutes in lightly salted boiling water. Drain, squeeze out water from leaves, and chop into small pieces. Peel garlic and chop fine. Melt butter over medium heat in a large, nonreactive skillet and add the chard. Turn the chard in the butter as it begins to wilt, add the garlic, and continue cooking slowly, uncovered, for 7-8 minutes, until leaves have begun to soften. Warm milk in small saucepan.

Sprinkle flour over chard and stir to distribute the flour evenly. Cook for 1 minute more and slowly add milk, about ¼ cup at a time. Continue adding milk in small amounts as it is absorbed by chard until the milk is completely incorporated. Season with a light grating of nutmeg, salt, and pepper; transfer to a buttered gratin dish. The layer of chard should be about 1 inch thick. Cover evenly with breadcrumbs and bake for 35 minutes, until browned nicely. Enjoy! Your farmers, Laura and Adam