



Live Earth Farm (Com)Post

A weekly newsletter for the Live Earth Farm CSA Community

11th Harvest Week

July 10th – 16th, 2002

Season 7

What's in the box this week:

Strawberries
Arugula
Asian braising mix
Red beets (Forono)
Broccoli or Broccolini
Carrots
Cucumbers
Garlic
Kale
Lettuce
Onions
Freshly dug red potatoes
Summer squash
Sugar snap peas or
green beans

and if you have an extra-fruit share:

Strawberries plus a
mixed bag of plums and
apricots

(coming next week:
green beans!!)

All you ever wanted to hear about Potatoes: This year the potato crop is ahead of its close cousin the tomatoes, and since we're harvesting our earliest variety (Red Norland) this week to place in your share box, I can't resist but give you a brief introduction to this incredible plant and its fascinating history.

Potatoes are fun to grow and if you ask me which crop I enjoy growing the most, potatoes are right up there on top of the list. The sight of a lush, green, potato field dotted with white and purple flowers is one of the highlights of the season. Slipping your hand under the loose soil and pulling up the first new potatoes is like finding a buried treasure. Do you know that the so called "Irish" potato actually comes from the highlands of Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, where it has been cultivated for over 5000 years?

Potatoes were the staple of the Incas, who grew and ate hundreds of varieties. They even made a potato liqueur in some of the earliest known stills. Like its relatives the tomato and pepper, the potato arrived in Europe with the

Spanish explorers. Within a few decades it replaced the parsnip as the vegetable staple of Europe. The Irish were the first to grow the potato extensively since it yielded 4 to 5 times more calories per acre than any of the traditionally grown cereal grains. By changing their diet, it allowed the Irish to survive without having to depend on the English grown grains. In war-torn Europe peasants planted potatoes as a kind of insurance since potatoes could be left in the ground through the winter and dug only as needed for daily consumption. This would allow peasants to survive the raids of soldiers during wartime: soldiers usually could not take the time to dig the field to get their food, and certainly they would not do so if grains were stored in neighboring barns. However in 1845-46, the year of the devastating "Irish Potato Famine", Late Blight (*Phytophthora Infestans*), a common fungal disease that thrives under cool and wet conditions (i.e. Irish weather), wiped out most of the Irish potato crop. Hundreds of thousands died before public relief could be organized, and scores of thousands who survived emigrated to America. The harsh lesson of this famine was the importance of maintaining a diversified farming system, i.e. don't rely solely on one type of crop (mono-cropping).

*"To see a World in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour." - William Blake*

Although Potatoes grow underground they are not really roots. They are the swollen end of skinny underground stems called rhizomes. To stimulate their growth, about a quarter to a third of the plant has to be covered with soil, or hilled up to stimulate the formation of "tubers". Today heirloom potatoes are making a comeback. There are hundreds of exciting varieties now available. They come in unique shapes and colors, from purple, knobby "fingerlings" to round red skinned boilers, to oval, brown skinned boilers. On the farm this year we have the early red, thin-skinned type with low starch content, perfect for grilling, boiling and roasting. There's the purple Peruvian with its oval shape, dark blue skin, and deep purple mealy flesh. Then we have the sweet and nutty all-purpose yellow potatoes like Yukon Gold and Yellow Finn as well as my favorite "Fingerling," the Russian Banana, which stays firm when cooked, making them great for roasting, potato salads and sautees. I hope I haven't bored you too much with my potato story, enjoy them throughout the season and if you wonder how to best strike up a conversation with me ask me about "you-know-what". - Tom

Of Interest

Water use in California: As we enter into the dry months of the year here are some interesting statistics to consider. I guess we can make a difference and conserve water by the food choices we make????!! This is the water required to produce *one pound* of each of the following California foods, according to

Soil and Water specialists of the Univ. of California Agricultural Extension, who in turn worked with livestock farm advisors: lettuce, 23 gallons; tomatoes, 23 gallons; potatoes, 24 gallons; wheat, 25 gallons; carrots, 33 gallons; apples, 49 gallons; *chicken*, 815 gallons; *pork*, 1,630 gallons; *beef*, 5,214 gallons. In California, it is irrigated pastures (grass grown in near desert climates for cows) that consume more water than any other entity or industry -- not Los Angeles, or the oil, chemical or defense industry. (excerpted from Marc Reisner's "Cadillac Desert" in John Robbins' book: "The Food Revolution") 🌱

Children's Mini-Camp Reminder

Be sure and get your registration in to Constance if you want to participate in this year's mini-camp! Remember, it is limited to only 12 families, on a first-come, first-served basis. See last week's newsletter for details. If you didn't get last week's newsletter (the one Tom did), go to our website for a posted copy. 🌱

Wednesday Schedule-change Reminder

If you missed last week's newsletter, we have changed our Wednesday delivery route, which means (for many of you) that you can pick up your produce a lot earlier if you like! (The website will be updated with this information in a week or two.)

Aptos: 10am – 8pm

Live Oak: 10:30am – 8pm

Santa Cruz Downtown: 11am – 8pm

Santa Cruz West Side: 11am – 8pm

Scotts Valley: 11:30am – 8pm

Ben Lomond: 11:30am – 8pm

San Jose Downtown: (no change)

Gilroy: 2:30pm – 8pm

Prunedale: 3:30pm – 8pm

MBARI: 3:30pm on

Moss Landing: 3:45pm on

Monterey: 4:15pm on 🌱

Notes from Debbie's Kitchen

Have a recipe you'd like to share? Contact the newsletter editor.

I wish to give credit to Julia Wiley of Mariquita Farm for the following absolutely wonderful advice on making potato salad. I pulled this from her July 3rd newsletter for "Two Small Farms" (another local CSA). I read it last week, and just felt it was so appropriate for the arrival of potatoes in our boxes (as well as the arrival of hot weather!). Julia credited an article by Karen Tack and Pam Anderson, from "Cooks Illustrated", July 1994. - Debbie

Potato Salad useful info

For the best potato salad, use low-starch potatoes, boil them in their skins, and drizzle vinegar both on the potatoes and in the dressing.

The challenge: There are good ways and there are better ways of making even a dish as seemingly straightforward as potato salad. Though recipes may seem dramatically different, most have four things in common: potatoes (of course), fat (usually bacon, olive oil, or mayonnaise), an acidic ingredient to perk things up, and flavorings for distinction. Though these salads may be very different in character, the issues affecting all of them, as it turns out, are much the same. For example,

what type of potato should be used? What is the best cooking method? Finally, should potatoes be seasoned when still warm, assuming that they do absorb flavorings better in this state?

The solution: After boiling, steaming, baking/roasting, and microwaving four different varieties of potatoes -- Red Bliss, russets, all-purpose, and Yukon Golds -- we found that boiling was the cooking method of choice. However, that was true only if using low-starch boiling potatoes such as Red Bliss or new potatoes. For the most part, we found high-starch potatoes -- russets, all-purpose, and Yukon Golds -- not sturdy enough for salad making. We found that high-starch potatoes do indeed absorb better than the lower-starch -- to a fault. When tossed with the same amount of dressing, the high-starch potato salads tasted dry, sucking up all the dressing and asking for more. These mealy high-starch potatoes, we determined, were great for mashing or baking but not for salad. The low-starch boiling potatoes successfully absorbed the vinegar and most of the oil. We liked the firm yet creamy texture of this potato. We also had learned that warm potatoes absorb vinegar, but too much vinegar on the potatoes make them taste

pickled. On the other hand, mixing all the vinegar with mayonnaise and then tossing with the potatoes produced a zesty salad dressing, with creamy but bland potatoes. Using a vinegar in moderation on both the potatoes and in the dressing provided the right balance.

For good measure: When pricking the potato to check for doneness, the thinner the utensil, the better. A fork, which is frequently the quickest thing to grab, is actually the worst testing tool; it visibly damages the potato, sometimes causing it to split. A thin-bladed knife or a metal cake tester works best.

This is Debbie again: I don't have room here for the three potato salad recipes that follow -- French, American and German versions -- but I will put them on the website for those of you who are interested. I don't know about the rest of you, but I for one am interested in making up something using the principles learned here... maybe instead of vinegar for 'acidic', I'll try lemon or lime juice, and our recent cilantro, some olive oil, garlic, cumin and/or cayenne (or maybe chipotle?), and salt of course. If I'm successful I'll post the recipe!