



Stewarding the Land for Future Generations
Local, Sustainable, Organic

Community Supported Agriculture Newsletter

September 28th, 2006- Week 17

Featured Vegetable of the Week: Winter Squash

Winter squash comes in many varieties and sizes. Unlike its summer counterparts, winter squash is harvested at a mature age, which makes the skin hard and inedible. The skin, however, is protective and increases its storage life. Winter squash can be stored for 3 months or longer.

The yellow and orange flesh of the winter squash is more nutritious and richer in complex carbohydrates, such as beta carotene, than summer squash. Winter squash is always served cooked and, because of its tough skin, only the inside flesh is eaten.

The name “squash” is an abbreviation of the word “askutasquash” from the Narragansett Indian language, a tongue the Pilgrims found challenging. Other tribes in the area had similar words that all meant “something that is eaten raw.” The Iroquois called it “isquoutersquash.” The Algonquians’ word, taken from the second syllable, was “askoot.”

Squashes are ubiquitous throughout both North and South America. The turban squash came from Brazil; the Valparaiso was from Chile; the Hubbard originated in the West Indies; and the cushaw was first found in Florida. The Spanish explorer, Francisco Pizarro, discovered winter squashes in Peru and brought seeds back to an unenthusiastic citizenry in his country. Archeologists uncovered stems, skins, and seeds of summer squashes in the caves of the Tamaulipas Mountains of Mexico dating back between 7,000 and 5,000 BCE. During that period the cave dwellers were beginning to cultivate squashes along with beans, chili peppers, and agave.

When the Pilgrims arrived in America, they encountered, among many squashes, the pumpkin that Native Americans had been cultivating for centuries. Some botanists believe squashes were the first cultivated crop of the Indians. To this day the “three sisters” refers to the three foods that appear together consistently in Native American cuisine: squash, corn, and beans. The origin of this expression is traced back to an Iroquois myth with the three vegetables representing three sisters who were inseparable.

After the mid-1500s many explorers from Europe who encountered squashes and pumpkins for the first time referred to them as melons. Though many varieties of gourds are native to Europe, squashes did not exist there before Columbus came to the Americas. Yet, historians began claiming that squashes grew in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, that there were recipes for squash in the first Roman cookbook by Apicius, that squashes were mentioned in Pliny’s writings, and that Charlemagne ordered squashes be grown in his gardens.

Though the explorers brought seeds back to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the London Horticultural Society experimented with what they called marrow squashes in their gardens in 1816, squash didn’t stir up any interest until the nineteenth century.

All squashes are members of the Curcubita family that produces varieties of every color, texture, shape, size, and range of flavors. The three main categories that exist in the Curcubita family are:

Curcubita pepo- includes zucchini, summer squashes, acorn, spaghetti, table queen, pumpkin, and gourds.

Curcubita maxima- includes hubbard, banana, buttercup, golden nugget, marblehead, and pumpkin.

Curcubita moschata- includes butternut, ponca, waltham, pumpkin, and calabaza

Squashes are a delight to grow. They’re easy to plant, don’t require a great deal of work, and are rewarding to harvest.

Ask the Farmers...

An anonymous CSA member asks, “How has the E. coli outbreak in spinach affected you? How do you prevent such bacteria from infection your crops?”

The pulling of millions of bags of spinach off the shelves due to an E. coli contamination has gotten a lot of people talking. On such a large scale, the packaging of spinach may be more economically efficient, at least until a problem like this. Now, the large scale farms are tilling in their spinach, workers are being laid off, and millions of dollars have been lost. The small scale farmer, like us, can guarantee the produce from field to consumer. We do still encourage consumers to wash their produce. On our land, we have had the water tested and feel confident that our produce is free from E. coli. The most likely cause of the recent spinach outbreak is contaminated irrigation water that has been a problem in California’s Salinas Valley where much of the U.S. spinach crop is produced.



Eden Luz, Quartz Creek Farm

Ask the Farmers...

CSA member Janey Hubert (age 10) asks, “What kind of irrigation system do you use? Why?”



Tom Powell, Wolf Gulch Farm

We use a gravity-fed drip irrigation system at Wolf Gulch Farm, primarily to conserve water. The other advantages to drip irrigation are that you can deliver water directly to the root system of your crops, you can minimize weeds because you aren’t watering the areas between beds, and you keep down mold and some water-borne diseases. The advantages to overhead irrigation are that you can create ambient moisture in your fields, you can under-sow a soil-building cover crop, and it is the only way to germinate a cover crop during the hot season. Overhead irrigation is also lower maintenance than drip irrigation, and pipes last much longer than drip tape.

At Boones Farm we drip irrigate all our crops. Our fields are all irrigated using gravity flow from a solar pumped spring box that sits on the high side of Boones Farm. Our faithful little spring gives us around 2200-2600 gallons per day (depending on the season). From our cistern we use a very simple photo-voltaic system to pump the water into our ag. tanks. From those tanks we can move water to any of our fields, gravity provides enough pressure to run our drip systems. Drip works really well for this type of low pressure, limited volume irrigation system. Water storage development is a priority on our farm and irrigation and water flow issues on the land are constantly in flux. Keeping the system dynamic allows for creative land and water use.



Mookie Moss, Boones Farm

Announcements

*Join us for our third Farm Day: Saturday September 30th from 11 - 3 pm at Dancing Bear Farm in Williams. Farmer Steve Florin will give a tour of the farm at 2 pm and will provide a large pot of chili. Bring plates, bowls and utensils and a potluck salad or dessert to share.

Directions: From Highway 238, turn onto the Williams Highway in Provolt (coming from Ashland, Medford or Jacksonville this would be a left turn, from Grants Pass, a right hand turn.) Follow that road for about four miles. It will turn into Cedar Flat Road. Dancing Bear Farm is located at 3433 Cedar Flat Road. There is a gate, but no code to enter: just press the gray button.