Farmer's Notebook

Summer officially arrives this weekend with the summer solstice - the longest day of the year in the earth's northern hemisphere. Since ancient times, civilizations around the world have celebrated the summer solstice and its relationship to the growth of crops. This is a time to savor and appreciate the warmth and promise of summer, and to begin to enjoy the fruits of spring plantings and labor. The transition from spring to summer is tangible on the farm, as our work cycle shifts from planting to weeding & harvesting, and our cool green spring crops wind down to make way for summer bounty.

You'll find several new items in your share box this week, including the first peas of the season. We grow two basic varieties of garden peas: flat snow peas and plump sugar snap peas. We used to grow a third variety of shell peas for freezing, but over time we’ve decided we prefer to shell and freeze the largest sugar snaps, which has helped streamline our planting. We do not currently grow any field peas (such as black-eyed peas) other than for cover-cropping.

Peas are planted on this farm as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring, usually mid-April. Although peas are fairly cold-tolerant, excessive wet soil can delay their growth – with this year's dry spring, we are starting our pea harvest about a week earlier than usual. We plant about 800 row feet of peas, all of which are trellised to keep vines off the ground in order to minimize spoilage (powdery mildew is the main threat to pea health) and mice nibbling. As legumes, peas fix their own nitrogen so soil fertility is not a major concern.

Like so many wonderful things, pea season is all too short – lasting only a few weeks, up to a month in a good year. As summer heats up, the hotter and drier days will stop pea production. Enjoy them while they are here! ~ Rachel

This Week's Harvest

Our best guess for what will be in this week's share boxes – subject to change at harvest & packing time.

garlic scapes – the flowering stalks of garlic plants, scapes contain the flavorful juice of the garlic. Most commonly chopped and sautéed, but can be eaten raw diced very fine or pureed for pesto. We find that these keep almost indefinitely wrapped in the fridge crisper drawer.

napa cabbage – nothing to do with California (“nappa” is a colloquial Japanese term for edible vegetable leaves), this is a Chinese cabbage. Try it in a stir fry, slaw, shredded taco topping or salad.

peas – snow or sugar snap varieties. Both should be eaten in their pods, raw or very lightly stir-fried. Refrigerate in a closed plastic bag.

summer squash (large shares only) - we’re expecting green zucchini to start, with other varieties in the wings. Store in fridge.

summer savory – a lovely summer herb with an earthy aroma and flavor similar to thyme. Store as a bouquet on the counter in a small jar of water, or spread on paper towel, wrap and place inside a sealed plastic bag.

Also... broccoli ~ lettuce

Fruit Shares: sweet cherries from our friends at Fix Bros Fruit Farm, a five-generation family orchard in Hudson. Cherries are a fickle and sensitive crop so we’re always a little anxious about whether they’ll be available, but this year’s crop looks very good. Sweet cherries are usually eaten out of hand as a wonderful snack. Generally I prefer to use sour cherries (next week’s planned fruit share) in pies and other baking, but sweet cherries can be used in most cherry recipes (try pairing them with rhubarb, which is my delicious exception to my own rule). Refrigerate unwashed, wash before eating. Avoid swallowing and never chew the pits! Conventionally grown.
Recipe of the Week: Napa Cabbage Stir fry

Adapted from a recipe on epicurious.com. As written, the recipe features napa cabbage in a starring role; you can diversify the dish with additional vegetables such as broccoli or peas.

• 1 pound boneless chicken or pork or firm tofu
• 2 ½ tbs soy sauce, divided
• 4 tsp cornstarch, divided
• 1 ½ tbs sugar, divided
• 2 tbs rice vinegar (not seasoned), divided
• 1 good-sized Napa cabbage,
• 2 tbs cooking oil
• 2-3 garlic scapes, chopped
• 1 tbs peeled & finely chopped fresh ginger

Cut meat or tofu into pieces ~1/4” thick. Toss with 1 tbs soy sauce, 2 tsp cornstarch, and 1 tbs sugar in a bowl. In a separate bowl combine vinegar, remaining soy sauce and sugar. In a third small bowl, combine remaining cornstarch with 2 tbs water, stirring until smooth.

Quarter cabbage lengthwise, remove core then cut crosswise into ~ 1 ½” pieces (you’ll have a lot of cabbage – it cooks down). Rinse in a large colander, leaving water that clings to leaves.

Heat ~1 tbs oil in a wok or heavy skillet over high heat. Add meat or tofu in single layer and brown about 3 minutes on each side (meat may still be slightly pink in center). Transfer meat/tofu and any juices to a plate. Add second tbs oil to wok over moderately high heat and stir-fry garlic scapes and ginger ~1 minute. Add half of cabbage and stir-fry over high heat until wilted, ~2-3 minutes. Stir in remaining cabbage (along with any water in bowl); add soy sauce mixture, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, ~5 minutes or until all cabbage is tender. Add meat/tofu and any accumulated juices, and bring to a boil. Re-whisk cornstarch mixture, then pour into skillet and boil, stirring, until sauce is slightly thickened, about 1 minute.

Season with soy sauce to taste. Serve with cooked rice or Asian noodles.

Another recipe: Garlic scape pesto

From the ever-wonderful Sarah Raven’s In Season. I routinely substitute sunflower seed kernels (salted or unsalted) for pine nuts in pesto because the former are so expensive.

• 2 generous handfuls of garlic scapes
• ¾ cup extra virgin olive oil
• 3 tbs pine nuts or sunflower seeds
• 2 oz freshly grated Parmesan cheese
• kosher or sea salt

Boil a pot of water. Blanch garlic scapes by submerging in boiling water for about 10 seconds, then immediately in cold water for another 10 seconds; pat dry. Chop roughly.

In a blender or food processor, puree garlic scapes with olive oil and pine nuts or seeds. Add parmesan cheese and blend roughly (or you can stir it in by hand).

Serve with pasta, rice, spread on bruschetta or however you best love to use pesto! Extra can be frozen.

From the archives

Need more recipe ideas? CSA newsletters back to 2010 are on our website: www.foxtailcommunityfarm.com/MemberNewsletters.html

Here are a few favorites to re-visit this week:

June 30, 2013: ~ Grandma Barbara’s cherry rhubarb crisp
June 30, 2014: ~ Fresh pea salad with radishes & mint