



Notes From the Pea Patch

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Farmer's Notebook

It's fair to say that spinach is the inspiration behind our farm's Winter CSA. As we enjoy our second spinach harvest of this winter season, I thought it was a good time for an article on this special crop.

I will start by confessing that spinach is not the favorite vegetable of anyone residing at Foxtail. Not that we dislike it, but it doesn't rise to the top of anyone's list. The kids prefer lettuce and Eric and I would take the more textured and flavorful kale over spinach most days.

We may not be alone. A quick google search for quotes celebrating spinach yielded pretty much nothing positive. Here are a few exhibits:

I don't like spinach, and I'm glad I don't, because if I liked it I'd eat it, and I just hate it.
~ Clarence Darrow

I realised there were no good role models for kids. Popeye eats spinach, but he also smokes and hits people.

~ Magnús Scheving

A bag of Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans. "You want to be careful with those," Ron warned Harry. "When they say every flavor, they mean every flavor – you know, you get all the ordinary ones like chocolate and peppermint and marmalade, but then you can get spinach and liver and tripe."

~ J.K. Rowling

And those are the most enthusiastic ones.

All this said, I wouldn't give up our February spinach for anything. Before we built our high tunnel, about this time each year I would start to experience a profound hunger for fresh greens. On the occasions I could get to a winter farmer's market I would spend a small fortune for a tiny bag of leaves that I would then eat standing over the sink before they ever made it into our dinner.

~ continued on reverse ~

This Week's Harvest

our best guess for what will be in this week's share boxes – subject to change at packing time:



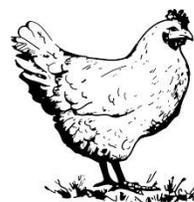
popcorn – a fun treat from the fall harvest. These have been dried and are ready for popping. Remove kernels by rubbing two cobs together over a deep vessel. For old-fashioned stove top popcorn, put a single layer of kernels in the bottom of a pot with just enough oil to coat, cover and shake over medium-high heat until popping stops.

rutabaga - these brassicas are bigger, denser, yellower, and sweeter than their turnip cousins. Store in fridge. To prepare, wash and trim the top and bottom, peel if desired. Use as you would other root vegetables – boiled, roasted, mashed, braised, or added to soups and stews.



spinach – store unwashed in plastic bag in the fridge. Wash & dry completely before using. You may see some small browned tips which are frost burn – just trim them away.

also...carrots ~ lettuce ~
onions ~ potatoes



Lots of eggs!
(Chicken shares are next delivery)



Recipe of the Week: Chicken, Spinach & Pasta “Pie”

I found inspiration for spinach recipes in Nigel Slater's lovely ode to backyard garden vegetables, *Tender*. I was torn between many great recipes, but this one sounded so delicious I went with it. He calls this a “pie” - that must be British for “casserole” - and describes it as “slightly less trouble than a lasagna”. Works for me.

- 12 ounces pasta (he recommends spaghetti, I think I would prefer penne)
- 10 ounces fresh mushrooms
- extra virgin olive oil & butter
- 1 pound boneless chicken
- 10 ounces (~2 glasses) white wine
- 2 cups cream
- ½ pound fresh spinach
- 1 cup grated Parmesan, divided

Cook pasta in salted water. Drain & set aside.

Pat chicken dry and season with salt & pepper. Melt 1 Tbs butter in a heavy pan and add a glug of olive oil. Saute chicken until browned on both sides and just cooked through, taking care not to dry out. Remove from pan. When cool enough to handle, cut into large pieces.

Quarter mushrooms. If needed, warm a little more butter & oil in your pan. Add mushrooms and cook until starting to color. Return chicken pieces to pan along with wine. Bring to a boil, scraping all bits from the bottom. Add cream, return to a boil, then turn off heat.

Wash spinach, leaving water droplets on leaves. In a separate covered pot, steam for just 1-2 minutes. Squeeze out excess liquid and chop.

Fold together cooked pasta, chicken-mushroom mixture, spinach and 2/3 cup of the Parmesan. Season with salt & pepper to taste.

Spread in a large baking dish and sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake at 350°F for ~35 minutes, or until crisp and golden.

~ continued from front ~

So I don't think I'm being melodramatic when I say that putting up the winter high tunnel changed my life.

Spinach is finicky to grow and hasn't done particularly well for us on this farm in the field. But it has flourished in the high tunnel, making our winter crop better and more reliable than our spring crop. Go figure.

Botanically, spinach is a member of the *Chenopodiaceae* family, distinct from lettuces and brassicas like kale, and most closely related to beets and chard. It originated in Persia and made its way to Europe around the 11th century. Many of the “classic” spinach-centered dishes come from Persia (now Iran), India, or Italy (the city of Florence specifically lending its name to spinach dishes).

Spinach is infamous for hiding grit in its leaves, so it needs to be rinsed thoroughly. The spinach in your shares has received a generous double rinse + spin before packing, but you'll probably want to rinse it again before using. It's also notable for shrinking down significantly when cooked - as our handy *Field Guide to Produce* says, “a lot goes but a little way”. So for most dishes spinach needs very little cooking - just a minute or two of steaming or sauteing will do it, and even raw in salads you should dress it close to serving time to avoid sogginess.

Spinach is high in oxalic acid, which elicits a “furry teeth” sensation for some people. British food writer Nigel Slater suggests that this can be mitigated by tossing cooked spinach with butter or cream, or by squeezing some fresh lemon juice on it. All of these pair nicely with spinach, as do nutmeg, orange, eggs, bacon, garlic, Parmesan, and mushrooms.

So whether it tops your list of garden favorites or not, we hope you'll make like Popeye and eat your spinach this week. Just please don't punch anyone out afterward.

~ Rachel