



Notes From the Pea Patch

Foxtail Community Farm ~

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Farmer's Notebook

Let's face it, the end of March is not the most inspiring time of year to celebrate eating local with the seasons in upstate New York. The calendar says spring, drifts of snow are getting washed away bit by bit, and seeds are sown in the greenhouse, but our first new harvests are still at least two months away. For now, eating local is looking a bit thin.

Nevertheless, I'm determined to cook and eat well from what is available locally. So I do what I always do – take a look at what we have and plan meals around it. A careful inventory yields a surprising number of treasures.

In the pantry we have a few onions still rolling around – a bit soft but usable - some garlic, and plenty of dried chili peppers. There are also several jars of dried herbs, dried apple rings, fruit jams, canned pear halves, black turtle beans and a few jars of tomato sauce. Root vegetables have held up well in the cooler, with plenty of carrots, at least a week's worth of potatoes, turnips and daikon radishes to choose from.

Our big chest freezer still has quite a few bags of colorful diced sweet peppers, shelled peas, corn kernels, snap beans, blueberries, sour cherries, chicken stock and even a couple jars of pureed pumpkin that I forgot about – plus plenty of beef and chicken. In the high tunnel, fresh spinach and lettuce are growing like gangbusters, spurred out of their winter torpor by the increasing hours of daylight and occasional warm days. And in the coops, laying hens and ducks are similarly revitalized by the coming of spring, with egg production quickly ramping up.

Suddenly, things are looking up for eating local in March and April. Chicken and peas from the freezer, onions and thyme from the pantry plus carrots, potatoes and turnips from the cooler

~ 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:



Carrots – we are so grateful for all our carrots this year! Believe it or not, they are starting to wind down but we should get at least one more delivery.

Lettuce & Spinach - our fresh greens are growing like crazy in the high tunnel! We hope you are keeping up with them. These have been rinsed post-harvest, but you should wash and spin dry again before eating.

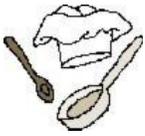


Popcorn – fun! Remove kernels by rubbing two cobs together. For old-fashioned stovetop popcorn, put a single layer of kernels in the bottom of a pot with just enough oil to coat (try coconut oil – so good!), cover and shake over medium-high heat until popping stops. You can also pop these on the cob, in a paper bag, in the microwave.

Potatoes – the last delivery of potatoes from our storage supply for the Winter CSA. Look for a mix of red, white & purple spuds for the final share.



Turnips - though often prepared like potatoes, these roots are actually members of the brassica family (related to broccoli, cabbage and others), with a mustardy bite typical of brassicas. Store in fridge. Trim tops and peel any tough outer skin. Use raw in salads/slaws, cooked in soups & stews; mashed turnips make a flavorful substitute for potatoes as a side dish.



Recipe of the Week: Farmhouse Beef Stew

A perfect dish for winter into spring. Even better the next day, if you have any leftovers. Chuck, shoulder, short rib, brisket or bottom round are great for stew meat.

- 2 pounds boneless stew beef
- dried herbs (I mix thyme, oregano and basil)
- kosher salt & freshly ground black pepper
- all-purpose flour (~1/2 cup)
- 1 tbs bacon fat (from that can you keep in your fridge) + 1 tbs olive oil (or just use all oil)
- 1 onion
- 3-4 cloves garlic
- 3-4 good sized carrots
- 3-4 potatoes
- 1 turnip
- 1 cup frozen peas, thawed
- 1 bottle beer (any kind you like)
- 3 cups beef stock/broth

Trim the beef and cut into bite-sized cubes. Season the meat with ~1 tsp of your herbs, salt & black pepper. Dredge each piece in flour, pressing to coat then shaking off any excess flour. In a good-sized Dutch oven (I love my *Le Creuset*), melt the bacon fat and add the oil to heat well. Add some of the meat (being careful not to crowd the pan) and brown it all sides. Remove with a slotted spoon and repeat until all your meat is browned. Set the browned meat aside.

Dice the onion, the garlic and one of the carrots. Add these to the drippings in the same pot along with another teaspoon of your herbs and a bit more salt and pepper. Cover and cook, stirring regularly, until the onions are soft. Return the meat to the pot, pour in the beer and stock – you should have enough to cover the meat nearly all the way, add more water if needed. Bring this to a boil, then reduce to the lowest heat, cover and simmer until the meat is fork-tender (about 2 hours). Stir periodically to keep meat from sticking to the bottom of your pot.

Cut the remaining carrots, potatoes and turnip into bite-sized chunks. Add these to the pot,

cover and cook another ~40 minutes, until the vegetables are tender. Add the peas, cover and cook another 5-10 minutes until everything is perfect.

If your stew is not thick enough, whisk in a tablespoon or two of kneaded butter (a 1:1 mixture of softened butter and all-purpose flour, kneaded together into pea-sized balls that you whisk in close to the end of cooking time).

~ Farmer's Notebook, continued from front ~

make a decadent filling for chicken pot pie, served alongside a fresh mixed green salad from the high tunnel and canned pear halves from the pantry. The next weekend, take the same ingredients with a different base, nearly any cut of beef and a long afternoon for braising in a well-sealed pot and you've got a farmhouse beef stew to serve alongside homemade bread.

A bit of onion, dried red pepper and basil, shredded high tunnel spinach, frozen sweet peppers, tomato sauce, fresh mushrooms from Bulich Farm in Catskill and some local pork sausage make an easy topping for homemade pizza. Diced carrots and turnips plus a handful of frozen peas go into a vegetable biryani, alongside lentils with garlic and spinach. And on that busy and tired night when nobody feels like cooking, a big stack of blueberry pancakes with home fries and scrambled eggs is the perfect break from meal planning.

Over the past few months, I re-read the entire *Little House* series. I loved these as a child, and have even more appreciation for them now that homesteading and farming is such a big part of my life. Fellow readers may remember the Ingalls family's long winter in South Dakota, snowed in and cut off from all supplies, through which they ate pretty much nothing but turnips, potatoes and eventually just bread made from wheat they ground by hand in a coffee grinder. Did I say our local harvest was feeling a little thin? For shame. We are privileged with bounty beyond measure. ~ Rachel