



Notes From the Pea Patch

Foxtail Community Farm ~ Vol. 12, No. 28 ~ October 9, 2017

Farmer's Notebook

I love a vegetable with a full back-story.

About six years ago, Eric and I enjoyed a lovely winter weekend in rural Vermont. My sister had given us a gift certificate to a B&B as a thank you for hosting their wedding on the farm. After a couple of dreamy days eating in restaurants and cross-country skiing, we headed home. Somewhere between Manchester and Bennington we stopped at a farm store to pick up mementos of our vacation (yes, a farmer's idea of a good souvenir is some kind of food item bought at another farm).

Since it was the middle of February, pickings at this farm store were rather slim. We got some apples and some maple syrup, and then we spotted these very large white and purple roots labeled "Gilfeather Turnips". This was a new one on us, so of course we asked about them. The farmer/storekeeper proudly provided a brief education on the heritage of this root vegetable, the most important point of which was her confident statement that this particular variety of turnip could be grown **ONLY IN VERMONT**.

So of course, the next day Eric went looking for some Gilfeather turnip seeds. We tracked them down pretty quickly through Fedco, the wonderful cooperatively owned company from which we source most of our seeds. We planted some that spring, dug them up in the fall, and wouldn't you know it they grow pretty well in upstate New York, too!

While pride alone might have been enough to keep this in our regular rotation, we actually found them to be a very likable root in their own right. Impressively large, knobby in a cute way with a sweet flavor and smooth texture more reminiscent of a rutabaga than a turnip. In fact, the two of us debated extensively whether the

~ continued on reverse ~

This Week's Harvest

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



brussels sprouts - these brassicas are literally "little cabbages" that grow on a thick tree-like stem (we need pruning shears to harvest these!). Snap buds off the stalk and store in fridge. Trim stem ends and wash well in cold water. Excellent steamed, sauteed, or roasted

celeriac - also called celery root. Despite its knobby & gnarled appearance, it has a wonderful celery flavor and a long storage life. Store in fridge. To use, trim the top and base, then peel. Dice it up in a winter soup or stew, roast it, braise it, mash it in place of or in combination with potatoes. Try a hearty mash of potatoes, turnips or rutabagas, celeriac and garlic with buttermilk and chives. Use greens for stock or mince as an herb.



gilfeather turnip/rutabaga - a special root with excellent sweet flavor, smooth texture and good storage life. Store in a cool dark area or refrigerate.

also... arugula? ~ broccoli (rotating shares) ~ carrots ~ lettuce ~ red onions ~ sweet peppers

Fruit Shares: Bosc pears from Fix Bros Fruit Farm (Hudson). A golden-brown variety with creamy, sweet, slightly spicy flesh. Leave on counter (bottom side down) to reach desired ripeness, then eat or store in fridge. Boscs do not change color when ripened, but the skin will appear more matte and fruit will be more fragrant. *Conventionally grown.*



COMING ATTRACTIONS

~ watermelon radish ~



Recipe of the Week: Gilfeather Soup

I would guess that there have been many versions of this recipe to be sampled at the annual Gilfeather Festival in Wardsboro, VT. This one is adapted from one I found at theheartofnewengland.com.

- 5-6 Tbs unsalted butter
- 3-4 onions, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 5-6 cups vegetable or chicken stock
- 2-3 pounds of Gilfeathers, peeled & chopped
- 1 cup milk or half-and-half (or combination)
- pinch of nutmeg
- salt & pepper to taste
- handful of Gilfeather tops or other robust seasonal greens (optional)

In a large soup pot, sauté onion and garlic until soft. Add stock and Gilfeathers. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until roots are tender. Drain, reserving the liquid.

Puree the vegetables in a blender (or with hand-held immersion blender) and return to soup pot. Stir in milk or cream and seasonings, then add back enough cooking liquid to thin to your preference.

If desired, sauté your greens in some olive oil until wilted. Garnish each bowl of soup with cooked greens.

What else can I do with rutabaga?

I got this question several times at the Harvest Fest this weekend from some CSA members already nervous about the rutabaga preview for this week! Never fear...

- ➔ Peel, boil, & mash with butter, salt & pepper (like mashed potatoes!)
- ➔ Peel, cube, toss with olive oil & sea salt, roast in oven at 400°F until fork-tender (alone or with other root veggies like carrots, potatoes, etc.)
- ➔ Peel, cube, add to beef or chicken stew, vegetable soup or other favorite one-pot meals
- ➔ Peel, cube & braise on stovetop with apple cider, leeks or onions, & sliced apples

~ continued from front ~

Gilfeathers should be labeled a “turnip” or a “rutabaga” in our CSA newsletter. In any case, the Gilfeather became part of our regular crop plan and has been with us ever since.

Since its arrival at our little farm, we've done some additional research on the heritage of this heirloom crop. As the story goes, the Gilfeather turnip was developed or discovered by John Gilfeather of Wardsboro, VT in the late 1800s. He sold them “by the cartload” in southern VT and western Massachusetts in the early 1900s. To this day, the tiny town of Wardsboro (pop ~850) celebrates its legendary root with an annual festival featuring Gilfeathers in every dish and even a signature song! Seriously, how can you not love this vegetable?

*Well back in eighteen-hundred whatever
A man came along by the name of Gilfeather
He brought along some turnip seeds
And put them in the ground
And that's how the Gilfeather turnip
Came to our tiny town....
~ Jim Knapp, songwriter & Wardsboro native*

Reportedly old farmer Gilfeather cut off the tops and bottoms off all his turnips so nobody else could grow them (and thus setting the stage for their lore). Thankfully some seeds “escaped” and were propagated by a dedicated pair of growers.

It's to this action – and the ongoing work of mission-drive seed cooperatives like Fedco – that we owe our gratitude for the continued availability of open-pollinated heirloom foods like the Gilfeather. Foods that are chosen and loved by farmers & communities not for their economic efficiency, or their shelf life on 3,000-mile truck rides to supermarket chains, but for their unique character, taste, and stories. It is humbling to be part of these stories – not just in their re-telling, but in keeping their subjects alive and loved for future generations.

Oh and by the way, we also learned that Farmer Gilfeather's famous root is, in fact, a cross between a turnip and a rutabaga. So we were both right.

~ Rachel