

Featherstone Fruits and Vegetables



The week of July 20, 2009

**This Week -
Likely In the Box**

Potatoes
Bunched Carrots
Bunched Kale
Greenhouse Cukes (last)
Summer Squash
Bunched Onions
Bulb Fennel
Green Beans (Thur & Fri)
Chard (Tues & Thurs)

Please note: This list is only a guess. Weather and other conditions are very unpredictable.

**Next Week -
Likely In the Box**

Beans
Summer Squash
Potatoes
Sweet Corn
Carrots
Cabbage
Basil
Garlic

Please note: This list is only a guess. Weather and other conditions are very unpredictable.

Weekly Box Contents and the Reality of Ripening Produce

It would be easy for a vegetable farmer like myself to simply blame the weather for irregular and unpredictable harvests (and by extension for sometimes irregular box contents). And indeed this season there would be some justification for this; a remarkably cool spring, followed by a solid week of 96+ degrees in mid June (!), and now record cool... how can we possibly predict what will be in your boxes next week?!?

I often think that blaming the weather is an overused excuse, however, and doing so oversimplifies the reality of growing, ripening and harvesting fresh produce in a 4 season climate like our own.

Certainly the contents of our CSA boxes this spring have varied, not only week-to-week, but on occasion day-to-day. I understand that this has produced some consternation for some of you, and for this I apologize. The weather has indeed made it difficult to predict what will be ready for harvest, and I have given projections more than once that have been flat wrong. But this is only part of the story. For a host of reasons outlined below, I have now concluded that attempting to assemble identical boxes for all shareholders four days a week does not make any sense, and that a change is needed.

As of August 3rd, Featherstone Farm will no longer publish a list of crops in the week's boxes, or a prediction for the following week, in the weekly newsletter. Instead we will post a new feature on the website each month entitled "the crops of August" (or September etc), with more detailed explanations of each. Shareholders like yourselves can consult this list when opening boxes each week. This will allow us to vary the contents of boxes day-by-day without stretching crops to or beyond the limits of quality, and without creating expectations among shareholders that we cannot meet.

I want to assure you right away that *this will not reduce the quantity* of what you receive over the course of a week, month or season. *Nor will it change the fair balance of crops between shareholders* (ie Tuesday boxes will not contain more sweet corn than Thursday boxes over the course of a season). Mainly it will bring our harvest goals into line with the horticultural realities of the crops we produce.

Consider two examples, one a vegetable (beets) and the other a fruit (cherry tomatoes).

Beets are seeded in a dense row so that they can compete better with weeds and produce more yield in a certain area. Depending on how well they emerge and grow, they almost always need to be “thinned” as they begin to mature; at FFV, we pull 20-30% of the plants when they are young and suitable for bunching, to allow the balance of the crop more room to develop larger bulbs. If we planted enough beets so that we could make a full bunch for every CSA member in the same week as soon as the first roots started to size up, the patch would have to be way too big, and many beets would become overgrown before they could be harvested.

Better to plant a modest size field, and count on thinning enough to make bunches for 30% of all CSA boxes three weeks in a row. In this way everyone gets roots that are optimally sized and highest quality, there is minimal waste, and we don't get stressed out trying to manage crops by the calendar (equal shares for all members in a 4 day period), rather than the reality of what happens in the field. Many other vegetables (greens, roots and brassicas) fall into this pattern as well.

Fruiting crops like **cherry tomatoes** present similar challenges but for different reasons. As tomato plants set fruit and begin to ripen, they tend to do so slowly. The first 2 pickings of a red grape cherry tomato plant, for example, are almost always light; the plants seem to need stimulus (light harvest) to create stress, to boost fruiting (DNA to Fruits: “Attention! We're under attack and need to reproduce to ensure survival!”).

Like with the beets, it just doesn't make sense to plant enough cherry tomatoes to ensure enough harvest in the first week of fruiting to put a pint in each CSA share box. Doing so would ensure that we would be overwhelmed by fruit (read: waste) in 2 weeks. Nor does it make sense to sell our first yields to stores, until we have enough fruit to fill all shares. We want to make all harvests available to shareholders early on, because you are the heart and soul of our farm.

Fluctuations of weather only compound these realities: crops develop and ripen according to their own schedules. Sometimes these schedules fit nicely with the calendar, more often they do not. We will certainly have *plenty* of beets and cherry tomatoes for all shareholders over the season, we just can't predict that everyone will get an equal amount in a given 4 day period.

I very much appreciate your interest in these questions (you've read to this point!), and your patience in seeing them worked out in your weekly newsletter and box contents.

One of the real advantages that the CSA model affords is the opportunity for communication and education between farmer and consumer, and this is a two way street; if you have questions and concerns about this, we'd very much like to hear them.

This is *your* program, folks. Please let us know (always!) how we can make it work better for you!

Thanks,

Jack
Featherstone Farmer

Peggy Hanson is a food writer, local food advocate and aspiring food coach who lives in Lanesboro, Minnesota. This column originally appeared in the Fillmore County Journal on August 21, 2006.

Peggy welcomes your questions and comments.

Contact her at mjhanson50@gmail.com.



REAL FOOD

I don't like to beat around the bush. Sometimes it is important to discuss difficult subjects. Openly. Respectfully. Fearlessly. It is time to just come out and say it. Size matters. Oh, I know people say it doesn't. That what counts is what you do with them, not how big they are.

Well, not me. I like my zucchini small. I wonder – why do people let their zucchini get so big? I am talking four inch diameters and more. Like dark green torpedos. Are they trying to prove something? (Hey – look at me! Is my zucchini big or what!) Do they intend to use them for target shooting? Or assault and battery? Maybe they are entering a contest. Or are they just letting their zucchini plant get out of control? Don't they know zucchini plants need close supervision? If they are not willing to do what it takes to raise their zucchini properly, then maybe they should just not plant them in the first place. It is inconvenient. To watch over them and cut the squash when they are still slim. When their skins are tender. When their seeds are immature. When you can easily fit one into the feeding tube of your food processor.

Our zucchini plants are counting on us to do the right thing even when it is inconvenient. To watch over them and cut the squash when they are still slim. When their skins are tender. When their seeds are immature. When you can easily fit one into the feeding tube of your food processor.

Some of you might be thinking –“but if I don't let my zucchini get big, I won't have enough to make lots and lots of zucchini bread and casseroles. “ Excuse me? Not enough zucchini? Actually, what we have found in our years of zucchini growing is that picking zukes when they are young and picking them often actually stimulates more growth. So in terms of overall weight of useable vegetable, you really are better off if you stay on top of the plant, so to speak, and keep picking those little guys. And then you don't need so many plants. More room in the garden for other good things.

If you would like to try some locally raised chicken from Hilltop Pastures family farm, you could head on over to Pedal Pushers in Lanesboro, for their Old Fashioned Chicken Fry on Saturday, Aug. 26. And on Sunday, Aug. 27 at the Harmony Park East from 1 to 4 p.m. you can attend a potluck picnic and food swap hosted by the Local Food Network of Fillmore County. The mission of this new group is to provide a network where consumers can purchase locally grown and raised food. I'm all for that.

One more thing about zucchini. I hope you had a chance to stop by the Chatfield Grower's Market last Thursday to enjoy Zucchini Day. Because of Journal deadlines, I can't give you a personal report. But it looked like they had some fun things planned, including a contest for the **BIGGEST ZUCCHINI!**

Zucchini Pancakes This is a good dish for breakfast, brunch, lunch or supper or even a first course for a special dinner party. Serves about 4. Adapted from a Molly Katzen recipe.

4 eggs, separated. Beat whites until stiff

4 cups packed coarsely grated zucchini

1 cup finely crumbled feta cheese

1.2 cup finely chopped scallions (onions will do, too)

1 t. dried mint or 1 T fresh, finely minced. (Fresh really is best if you can get it)

A little salt and pepper

1/3 cup flour (dry bread crumbs also would work)

Mix all ingredients except whites. Then gently fold in whites. Drop spoonfuls into hot oil (just to coat the pan). Fry on both sides until nicely browned. Serve with a little plain yogurt or sour cream. Optional variation – substitute 1 cup of grated carrot for 1 cup of zucchini. Substitute parsley for mint and cheddar for feta.



Your Box & Your Pet

Throwing too
much out? Let
your pets in on
the fun!

By Melinda Feucht

You wouldn't believe the requests that come through the door at City Kitchens, a gourmet cooking store in downtown Seattle where I work part-time. Little umbrellas for lemonades, PB & J de-crusters, and most recently - a pan for making dog food. *A. Pan. For. Making. Dog. Food.*

This particular customer, who I immediately tagged crazy, turned out to be my muse for this week's newsletter. Noticing the raised eyebrows he asked, "Well would you want to eat what's listed on those cans and bags?" He had a point, a point which made me think of you all, trying so hard to get through each week's box before the next one graces your home. You've probably experienced that feeling of defeat, not quite getting to the bottom of it, and having to throw some out. Why not make it pet food?

I'm not suggesting that you buy an additional share to feed your furry friend, but if your extras are headed for the trash can or compost bucket anyway, you might as well give these ideas a shot. You don't need a special pan or equipment, this customer just had a very organized kitchen and preferred having a separate pan. I imagine - so he could make his dog's food while he made his own dinner, all the while drinking Pinot Noir together and discussing local politics. *I kid.*

So go ahead. Turn on MPR, pour a glass, cook yourself and your dog some dinner, and say goodbye to the 'They worked so hard to grow this' guilt of throwing away aging produce. I wouldn't recommend doing it all the time, but it may be a nice treat for them.

Vegetable Stew

organic-pet-digest.com

Ingredients

(mix and match these according to your leftovers)

3 Tbs olive oil

3 garlic cloves, crushed

1 large sweet pepper, sliced

1 medium zucchini, sliced

1 medium yellow squash, sliced

1 medium eggplant, peeled & cubed

1 potato, peeled & cubed

1 tsp. oregano or basil

salt/pepper

Instructions

Heat oil; add garlic and saute for 2-3 minutes until softened. Add all of the vegetables. Mix thoroughly. Bring the mixture to a boil, then lower the heat and let simmer for 30 minutes. Add the seasonings to taste. Simmer 15 minutes more. Let cool. Top with grated Cheese, if desired.

Tips: You may want to consult a vet first. To get your animals used to the taste, start by mixing it into their existing food. Sautéed chard stems, carrot tips, beet greens, the chopped peelings of any vegetable, etc.

As always, questions and comments welcome at feucht22@gmail.com

Putting Up Beans & Summer Squash

Eating the bounty of our region has been a passion of mine for over 30 years, and putting local food on the table all year-round has become an obsession. I've been teaching food drying and other food preservation techniques since 1978, and have written a small book "A Pantry Full of Sunshine" on the subject of energy-efficient ways of accomplishing this task.

To see more of what I've been up to, check out www.GeoPathfinder.com and go to the Food Preservation page.

Larisa
Wholesale Coordinator & Farm Bookkeeper



Green or yellow beans can be dehydrated by first cutting into ½"-3/8" slices (after removing ends, or course) or by cutting lengthwise into thin strips using a bean "frencher". To best preserve the fresh flavor you'll need to blanch the cut beans. Very light steaming works best – steam only until the color changes slightly. Then dehydrate until crisp.

If you like pickles, you'll love Dilly Beans:

In each pint canning jar, place ½ t. Dill Seed (or use fresh dill – about ½ head), 1 peeled Garlic clove, and ½ T salt. Pack jar full of beans that have been cut to fit standing up in a pint jar, leaving a ½" headspace. (You can put all of the cut off pieces into 1 jar by themselves, or use them up in your next meal.) The liquid is 4 cups each of water and apple cider vinegar (this makes enough liquid for 9 pints). Bring this liquid to a boil and fill the packed jars leaving ½" headspace. Process for 10 minutes in a Boiling Water Bath (BWB) (or steam canner – please ask me about this if you want to save energy).

Yellow Summer Squash are especially nice for making Bread & Butter Pickles:

6 quarts sliced Summer Squash (or Cukes)

1-1/2 quarts sliced Onions

3 stalks Celery or 1 t. celery seed

3 T salt

Mix all of the ingredients together and let stand 2 hours, then drain off liquid.

For the liquid, bring the following ingredients to a boil:

3-3/4 C Apple Cider Vinegar

¾ C Honey (can sub maple syrup or sugar)

2 t. Turmeric (or curry if you like it spicy)

1-1/2 T Mustard Seed

Add hot liquid to drained vegies and bring entire mixture to a boil, then simmer 5-10 minutes. Hot pack into pint jars, leaving ½" headspace and process for 10 minutes in BWB.

Recipes

KALE & Tomatoes with Pasta Shells

from fooddownunder.com

Ingredients

2 tbl olive oil
1 lrg onion, diced
2 x cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup red wine or more to taste
1 x red bell pepper, diced
1 tsp salt
Freshly ground pepper
1 pt cherry tomatoes, halved, or 2 large tomatoes, chopped, with liquid
1 bn kale leaves, coarsely chopped
2 tbl fresh basil, coarsely chopped
1 lb medium shells, farfalle or penne, cooked according to pkg directions
Grated Parmesan cheese

Instructions

Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and garlic; cook until soft and fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add wine, bell pepper, salt and pepper to taste. Cook until bell pepper softens, about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes; cook 2 minutes. Add kale. Leaves will overflow, but try to mix as well as you can; kale will shrink. Cook until leaves are soft but not soggy, about 6 minutes. Add basil; cook 1 minute. Toss kale-tomato mixture with pasta. Season with more salt and pepper if desired. Top with cheese.

KALE & Seasoned Hash Browns

adapted from fooddownunder.com

Ingredients

1 tbl olive oil
OR non-stick vegetable spray
2 lb frozen (or pre-cooked) hash brown potatoes
1/2 cup onion chopped
1/2 tsp all season salt
2 cup fresh kale chopped
1/4 cup water)

Instructions

Heat oil over medium-high heat (375 degrees F) in large fry pan. Add onion and saute until onion is translucent. Add hash browns, cover and cook 15 to 20 minutes, turning every 2 minutes. Sprinkle potatoes with all season salt. Add 1/4 cup water and chopped kale on top of potatoes do not stir. Cover and let cook over medium heat 3 to 5 minutes, until kale begins to wilt. Remove from heat and stir kale into potatoes. Serve hot. Yields 10 servings



Green Kale

Swiss Chard Recipe

from simplyrecipes.com

Ingredients

1 large bunch of fresh Swiss chard
1 small clove garlic, sliced
2 Tbsp olive oil
2 Tbsp water
Pinch of dried crushed red pepper
1 teaspoon butter
Salt

Instructions

Rinse out the Swiss chard leaves thoroughly. Remove the toughest third of the stalk, discard or save for another recipe (such as this Swiss chard ribs with cream and pasta). Roughly chop the leaves into inch-wide strips.

Heat a saucepan on a medium heat setting, add olive oil, a few small slices of garlic and the crushed red pepper. Sauté for about a minute. Add the chopped Swiss chard leaves. Cover. Check after about 5 minutes. If it looks dry, add a couple tablespoons of water. Flip the leaves over in the pan, so that what was on the bottom, is now on the top. Cover again. Check for doneness after another 5 minutes (remove a piece and taste it). Add salt to taste, and a small amount of butter. Remove the swiss chard to a serving dish.



Chard

Recipes

Spring Salad with FENNEL and Orange

from allrecipes.com

Ingredients

Dressing:

- 1/4 cup white sugar
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
- 3 tablespoons olive oil

Salad:

- 1 (10 ounce) bag mixed salad greens
- 1 small fennel bulb, thinly sliced
- 1 orange, peeled and segmented
- 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries

Instructions

Whisk together the sugar, red wine vinegar, salt, pepper, basil, and olive oil in a small bowl until the sugar dissolves; set aside. Toss the salad greens, sliced fennel, orange, onion, almonds, and cranberries in a large bowl. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss to serve.

FENNEL Edamame Saute

from chefmom.sheknows.com

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 fresh fennel bulb, trimmed, sliced
- 1/2 cup chopped pancetta
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds, crushed
(use the bottom of a skillet or flat side of a mallet)
- 2 cups shelled edamame (thawed if frozen)
- 1/4 cup vegetable broth
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil

Instructions

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook onion and fennel, stirring often, for about 5 minutes. Add pancetta and fennel seeds and cook, stirring, for 1 to 2 minutes.

Stir in edamame and broth. Season with salt and pepper and cook, stirring, for 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in dill and basil and remove from heat. Serve warm or at room temperature.

What is FENNEL?

from chefmom.sheknows.com

Fennel is far from being a new vegetable. It's culinary uses date back to ancient Greece and the flavorful, crisp bulb is found in a variety of Mediterranean dishes. Today, most of the fennel in the US hails from California, with the fennel season ranging from October through April. Fennel found at other times of the year is imported from Mediterranean countries.

Also called finocchio, fennel is comprised of a crisp white bulb the size of an onion that extends up into green stalks with feathery leaves that resemble dill. Though related to parsley, fennel delivers a delicate licorice-like flavor that adds intrigue to the many recipes it can be featured in. Fennel can be eaten raw, as in salads or salsas, and becomes heavenly when braised or sautéed, served as a side or as an integral component of a dish. At about 70 calories per entire bulb, fennel deserves a place in your mealtimes!



PREPARING FENNEL

The Wellness Encyclopedia of Food and Nutrition, Shelden Margen, M.D.

Baking: First, braise the fennel for about 5 minutes. Transfer to a baking dish and add just 1/2 cup of the cooking liquid. Cover tightly and bake at 350 degrees until just tender and beginning to brown. If desired, uncover toward the end to allow any excess liquid to evaporate, then sprinkle with breadcrumbs and grated Parmesan cheese, and brown under the broiler before serving. Cooking time: about 1 hour.

Braising: Braise fennel in broth, tomato sauce, vermouth or sherry (diluted 1-to-1 with water); add lemon zest, garlic, or onion for extra flavor. Braised fennel is delicious hot, warm, or chilled. Place fennel slices, or halved or quartered small fennel bulbs, in a sauce pan and add just enough boiling liquid to barely cover the vegetable. Simmer uncovered, turning occasionally, until the fennel is tender, adding more liquid if necessary. Cooking time: 25 to 40 minutes.

Sauteing: Cut fennel into slivers and heat in a small amount of stock, tossing and stirring it frequently. For extra flavor, cook chopped onion and garlic along with fennel. A sprinkling of lemon juice and zest makes a nice finishing touch. Cooking time: 10 to 15 minutes.

Steaming: Fennel steamed until crisp-tender can be covered with your favorite sauce or marinated in a vinaigrette, chilled, and served as a salad. To steam it, place whole or halved bulbs in a vegetable steamer and cook over boiling water until just tender. Cooking time: 20 to 30 minutes.