



Sisters Hill Farm

127 Sisters Hill Road, PO Box 22, Stanfordville, NY

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Notes from Apprentice Stefan



The farm played host to two big volunteer events this week. Wednesday, on the 4th of July, we held our annual garlic harvest, and Thursday marked the second visit of a group of volunteers from the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Manhattan.

For me, the garlic harvest stands as one of the seasonal landmarks of the farm year. The 4th of July. Undeniably high summer. By this point, the garlic had been in the ground since the previous October -- when it was planted during another landmark volunteer event. It lay nestled in the frozen winter soil for months, sprouted in earliest spring, grew and grew, was cultivated several times, and reached the peak of its size and vitality weeks ago. Indeed, lately, the plants have looked decidedly "over the hill." Small insect pests called thrips have been attacking them, and their leaves had become quite yellowed and degraded. We were concerned that we might need to schedule the harvest event earlier than normal this year. Farmer Dave worried that the outermost bulb wrappers -- that is the subterranean part of the lowest leaves of the plant -- might have begun to rot away beneath the soil. If too many of these bulb wrappers had been compromised, the garlic cloves themselves would simply have rotted or desiccated when we pulled up the plants. We need these protective layers to remain intact so that the bulbs will cure properly when we hang them in the barn.

As last week progressed, we pulled up a few sample garlic plants to check on the health of the bulbs. Fortunately, our tests reassured us that the bulbs remained in better shape than the readily observable parts of the plants. We also kept an eye on the weather forecast, since a period of wet soil conditions would have greatly increased the risk of rot. With fairly dry weather "promised" us by the trusty internet, we felt confident that the garlic harvest could go ahead on its traditional date. We had a great turnout on Wednesday, and the harvest rolled along merrily. I enjoyed watching how people spontaneously transitioned from pulling, to tying, to gathering bunches, to hanging them up at the barn in a smooth, organic flow. With the help of our vivacious volunteers, we harvested more than 6,500 bulbs of garlic and strung them up in the back barn in only two hours' time. (A quick calculation indicates that 6,500 bulbs total, less roughly 1,500 that we'll save for planting next year's crop, divided amongst about 240 shares, yields approximately 20 bulbs of garlic for each full share. Not too shabby.) Many thanks to all our volunteers, and we hope to see you again in October when we plant next year's crop!

- ½ cup honey
- 1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- 2 Tbs. mustard seeds
- 1 Tbs. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Directions

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the cabbage, carrots, and onion.
2. In a saucepan over medium heat, mix the vinegar, oil, honey, lemon juice, mustard seeds, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil, stirring often.
3. Take the dressing off the heat; immediately pour it over the vegetables.
4. Toss well, cover, and refrigerate for at least 6 hours (overnight is best) before serving.

Quick-Roasted Beet Slices - Serves four as a small side dish.

Ingredients

- 1 lb. small or medium red or yellow beets (or a combination), scrubbed but not peeled
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves

Directions

1. Heat the oven to 450°F. Cover two large rimmed baking sheets with parchment. Slice off the tops and bottoms of the beets and then slice the beets into rounds as thin as possible 1/8 inch thick is ideal). If your beets are large and tough, cut them in half first, lay them on their sides, and cut half-moons instead of rounds for safer cutting. Toss the slices well with the olive oil, salt, and thyme and spread them in one layer, with a little space between each, on the two baking sheets. Roast for 20 to 25 minutes, swapping the pans to opposite racks halfway through. The beets will be soft and shrunken, slightly glistening on top, and dark around the edges. The thinnest slices will be crisp and almost burned around the edges.
2. If making the beets well ahead of serving, wrap and refrigerate them for up to 2 days; allow them to warm up a bit at room temperature before using them in the salad. To reheat them as a side dish, spread the slices on a parchment-lined baking sheet and heat in a 350°F oven for about 5 minutes.

Then, on Thursday, we tackled several farm projects with the assistance of several employees of the Ritz-Carlton hotel. This is the second time this year that a group of Ritz-Carlton volunteers had helped us. Their first visit was on May 1st, when they helped us plant all of this year's potatoes. This Thursday, some of the same folks returned for a second go-round and brought a few new faces with them. We set them to work on quite a series of projects: finishing the hay mulch on the tomatoes and the first succession of Swiss chard, weeding the flower patch, weeding some of the onions, weeding the peppers, and then revisiting the potato field that they seeded to pull giant pigweed out of all 21 beds of it. It was a lot of work, and because of their help, we wrapped up several ongoing projects. On both visits, I was impressed with what pleasant attitudes these volunteers have shown. It was raining on their first visit, and they were great sports about lugging buckets full of steaming horse manure out to fertilize the potato beds. This time, they handled the high summer heat with the same cheerful attitude. And they brought us lunch. Terrific! At the end of the day, I find it immensely encouraging to think that a group of people might spend a day to travel a couple hours up to a farm and help a handful of strangers weed their onion field. Volunteers are the best!

 ******From Eatingwell.com******

String Beans & Summer Squash - 6 servings, about 3/4 cup each
Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 pound green and/or yellow wax beans, trimmed and halved
- 1 large summer squash, halved lengthwise, then cut crosswise into 1/2-inch slices
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- ½ cup reduced-sodium chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 1 teaspoon dried marjoram or 2 teaspoons fresh chopped

Directions

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add beans, squash, garlic, salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are beginning to brown, about 3 minutes.
2. Add broth, cover and reduce the heat to medium. Cook until the beans are tender-crisp, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in marjoram.

******From Wild About Greens Cook-*

*book******.

Sesame-Ginger Salad Dressing—About 1 cup
Ingredients

- Salty, and just slightly sweet and tangy, this is the perfect dressing for Asian-style salads that feature bok choy and other greens.
- 1/3 cup olive oil or other healthy vegetable oil 2 tablespoons dark sesame oil
- 1/3 cup rice vinegar or white wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon agave nectar or other liquid sweetener
- 2 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce or tamari 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger or jarred ginger 1 tablespoon sesame seeds

Directions

Combine all ingredients in a tightly lidded jar. Shake well before each use.

******From Fine Cooking in Season Cookbook.com******

Pan-Seared Summer Squash with Crisp Rosemary - serves 3 to 4
Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 14 ounces small zucchini and yellow squash (about 1 each), cut into 1/2-inch rounds
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon whole fresh rosemary leaves

Directions

1. Heat the oil in an 11- to 12-inch skillet (preferably cast iron) over high heat until shimmering hot.
2. Arrange the squash in the skillet, cut side down and in a single layer. Season with ¼ teaspoon of the salt and a few grinds of pepper. Sprinkle the rosemary over the squash and sear the squash undisturbed until deep golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes.
3. Using tongs, turn the squash onto the other cut side. Sprinkle with another ¼ teaspoon salt and cook until tender and nicely browned on the second side, about 2 minutes more.
4. Transfer the squash and crisp rosemary to plates or a serving bowl.

******From Fine Cooking Fresh Cookbook******

Overnight Coleslaw with Mustard Seed - Yields 11 cups
Ingredients

- 1 head green cabbage, cored and thinly sliced
- 2 carrots, peeled and grated 1 medium white onion, diced 1 cup white-wine vinegar 3/4 cup canola oil