



Sisters Hill Farm

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

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Notes from Apprentice John Cooke



The theme of this month seems to be farm visits. This past Monday we had the pleasure of hosting around 40 CRAFT apprentices from the region on Sisters Hill Farm. CRAFT stands for: Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training. It is a cooperative effort of local organic and bio-dynamic farms organized to enhance educational opportunities for farm apprentices. Throughout the season different farmers host the apprentices from participating CRAFT farms. The host gives a tour and a presentation on a unique aspect of his/her farm operation. So far this year Anna, Stefan, and I have attended several CRAFT meetings on other farms and it's been fun to learn how different farmers do their work. Our theme for Sisters Hill was Systems- Mechanical Cultivation and Infrastructure. In a nutshell, we took the apprentices on a thorough tour of the farm and showed them all of the efficient systems that Dave has developed over the years. It was a real treat to have so many interested peers on the farm.

The tour commenced in the barn and after brief introductions from each participant we strolled outside to the front field where we have beds of squash, lettuce, and herbs. The first demonstration was of the row marker that we use to mark straight rows on our beds. Stefan took the stage first, mounted the small McCormack Cub tractor, fired up the engine, and proceeded to drive over a new bed marking it with the row marker while Dave narrated. We wanted to show the apprentices how by having consistently straight rows it makes mechanical cultivation so much easier. After Stefan finished up, Dave and I planted out lettuce into the newly marked rows so that everyone could see how easy it is to plant with accuracy in a well-marked bed. Then it was my turn to hop on the other Cub to demonstrate how we cultivate with the "budding" basket cultivators. With this implement we can drive right over top of the beds while the baskets spin through the surface of the soil breaking up the weeds. There are little gaps for the actual rows of plants so that only the weeds get turned up, while the straight rows of baby vegetables remain for us to finish the job with a bit of finger weeding. The apprentices were very intrigued by this process because of how it eliminates so much hand weeding. We still hand weed on Sisters Hill Farm but the mechanical cultivation is what makes the system efficient. As Dave says, always use the biggest tool first before you get down to smallest. In other words, first the tractor, then the wheel hoe, and then you can think about getting down on your hands and knees to weed. The tour continued over at our amazing washing station where we did a demo on how we wash, weigh and store the beautiful vegetables. After showing them how we move the harvest

- cream has reduced by half, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat.
- When the grill is ready, brush both sides of the eggplant and onion slices with the 1/4 cup olive oil. Arrange the vegetables on the grill and cook with the lid closed until the first sides have started to soften and get grill marks, 2 to 3 minutes for the eggplant and 5 to 6 minutes for the onion. Flip and cook the second sides with the lid closed until the eggplant is tender and the onion is nicely charred but not necessarily fully tender, 2 to 3 minutes more for the eggplant and 5 to 6 minutes more for the onion. Transfer the eggplant to a cutting board and sprinkle with 1/4 tsp. kosher salt and 1/4 tsp. pepper. Transfer the onion to a large sheet of foil, stack the slices, wrap tightly, and let rest until residual heat has softened the onion, about 5 minutes.
 - Remove the skewers from the onion slices. Coarsely chop the eggplant and onion and combine in a medium bowl. Add the cream mixture and the Parmigiano; stir to combine. Taste and add salt and pepper as needed. Brush the bread slices on both sides with oil and grill until lightly golden brown, 30 seconds to 1 minute per side. Top each slice with a generous dollop of the eggplant mixture.

******From FineCooking in Season Cookbook******

Quick Ideas for Beets

Beef Tenderloin with Beets and Blue Cheese

Arrange a bed of roasted beet slices on a serving plate and top with a bit of really good blue cheese and a seared filet mignon

Citrus-Marinated Roasted Beet Salad

Marinate roasted beet wedges in a mix of orange and lemon juice, fresh thyme, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Serve on a bed of arugula or other greens garnished with toasted hazelnuts

Quick Ideas for Green Beans

Serve Cooked Beans With a Tangy Yogurt Sauce flavored with mint, dill, or cardamom and spiked with a dash of cayenne

Tuck Cooked Beans Among Slices of Tomatoes and drizzle with olive oil for a simple, summery side dish.

bins around the concrete slab Dave invited everyone into the walk-in cooler for a little break from the heat and further information about our system. From the cooler we transitioned to the lower fields where we have winter squash, melons, watermelons, eggplant, tomatoes, and peppers. Anna was next up for driving the tractor and effectively demonstrated the use of the “sweeps” for cultivation and hilling up plants. Again, the apprentices paid close attention and were impressed by the efficiency and organization of the system. The rest of the tour touched on the irrigation and mulching which go hand in hand for the systems of weed control and soil moisture maintenance. The day ended well with thoughtful questions from the apprentices and meaningful answers from Dave. The comments written by the participants on the evaluation forms were overwhelmingly positive. One of them said, “This was the best CRAFT tour ever!”

***** *From member Gail Haas* *****

Escarole looks like a slightly denser green version of Romaine lettuce. It is a member of the chicory family. In this recipe one of the more less dense lettuces can be substituted,. Adjust the cooking time to sauté the denser greens. Enjoy!

Escarole And Beans

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 large head escarole, rough chop (some remove some stalks)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 4 clove garlic, minced
- 1 (16 ounce) cans cannellini beans, undrained
- 3 sprigs fresh parsley, chopped(if you have)

Directions

1. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Toss in 2 garlic cloves, add escarole, turning to coat with oil. Season with salt, pepper, and crushed red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes, or until tender.
2. In a separate skillet, heat remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium heat. Stir in garlic. Pour in beans with juices, and simmer until creamy, about 10 minutes. Stir in escarole and parsley; simmer 10 minutes more. You can also remove the escarole, and wipe out your skillet add the oil for the beans, cook a bit, then add the escarole back in. One less pot to wash!

***** *From EatingWell.com.com* *****

Pesto-Topped Grilled Summer Squash - 4 servings

Toasty rustic pesto takes simple grilled squash from ordinary to exceptional with tangy lemon and fresh garlic. Serve as a side dish or chop the grilled squash, combine with the pesto and toss with pasta for a light entree.

Ingredients

- ½ cup chopped fresh basil
- ¼ cup toasted pine nuts, (see Tip)
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 medium summer squash, (about 1 pound), sliced diagonally 1/4 inch thick
- Canola or olive oil cooking spray

Directions

1. Preheat grill to medium-high.
2. Combine basil, pine nuts, oil, Parmesan, garlic, lemon juice and salt in a small bowl.
3. Coat both sides of squash slices with cooking spray. Grill the squash until browned and tender, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Serve topped with the pesto.

Tips & Notes

To toast pine nuts, place in a small dry skillet and cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly, until fragrant and lightly browned, 2 to 4 minutes.

***** *From FineCooking.com* *****

Bruschetta with Grilled Eggplant & Vidalia Onion

Serves six to eight as an appetizer or “small plate.”

Ingredients

- 1 medium eggplant (1 to 1-1/4 lb.)
- 1 medium-arge (about 12 oz.) Vidalia onion (or other sweet variety, like Texas Sweet or Walla Walla)
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves, chopped
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for the bread
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- About 1/2 baguette, sliced diagonally into 1/2-inch-thick slices

Directions

1. Prepare a medium-hot grill fire.
2. Trim off 1/2 inch from the top and bottom of the eggplant. Cut the eggplant lengthwise into 1/2-inch-thick slices. Cut the onion crosswise into 1/2-inch-thick slices. To keep the rings together, insert toothpicks or small skewers horizontally through the rings of each slice.
3. In a small saucepan over medium-high heat, bring the cream, garlic, and thyme to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer gently until the