

Getting Ready for Fall and Winter: An Open Letter to Our Fellow Harmony Valley CSA Members

Dear Friends:

Wow! There's nothing like a fast and easy Harmony Valley lunch in the late summer. How about salad mix, tomatoes, and a little parmesan or goat cheese, drizzled with a little olive oil and balsamic vinegar? You probably have your own special ways to whip up the wonderful vegetables we get from Harmony Valley!

Getting into fall and winter may be a little different for some of you. It doesn't seem quite so easy to use rutabaga, cabbage or parsnips. Some of us (our names are at the bottom of this letter) have been wondering what we could do to help people stay as excited about the great fall and winter vegetables as you are with the familiar summer veggies. So we decided to send you this letter. Here's how some of us make the transition from summer to fall vegetables.

From Jane, a long-time member: "I love the fall, the autumnal splendor and the need to gather and harvest before the cold, dark days of winter set in. To me, the arrival of root vegetables reflects the best of the seasonal shift. Besides many of the colors matching what is traditionally thought of as autumn hues, root vegetables in the ranges of orange (e.g., carrots and sweet potatoes), yellow (e.g., turnips and rutabagas), red (e.g., beets and radishes) can provide meals perfect for the crisper temperatures that this season brings. I think that some root vegetables also give us insight into what a squirrel is up to in building its winter stockpile. Just as a squirrel has to wrestle with cracking a nutshell, as cooks we need to take on the challenge of splitting a winter squash! But oh, the chore is well worth it. The caramelized flavors of roasted root vegetables or the soothing texture of curry pumpkin soup or the exquisite tastes of squash risotto with sage are grand rewards for expending the effort.

"My advice for someone just starting out is to just jump in. But there are a few hints that I think are worth conveying. When working with root vegetables a sharp, heavy-duty knife is necessary. To make all of the pureed soups to which root vegetables lend themselves, a high quality food processor can lessen the chore versus struggling with a less-than adequate blender.

"When looking for recipes for specific root vegetables, pay attention to substitutions. Sweet potatoes can be used in any recipe that calls for carrots, pumpkin or winter squash. Turnips and rutabagas are interchangeable in any recipe. Many cooks will use carrots as a substitute in a recipe calling for parsnips or vice-versa.

Don't think that root vegetables are more time consuming to prepare and it is not worth the effort. For sure, many can be eaten raw — a handful of carrot or radishes is always an easy to grab and go possibility. Recognize that turnip and rutabagas can serve as primary components of cold salad slaw; I find the flavors most delectable when I combine either or both of those two veggies with a crisp, flavorful apple.



DELICATA SQUASH

"My closing statement is to remind you of the usefulness of the CSA developed cookbook "From Asparagus to Zucchini - A Guide to Farm-Fresh Seasonal Produce." If this is your first experience with preparing root vegetables, this book can serve as a guiding light. You may find it especially helpful in identifying storage tips. Bon Appetit!"

Mentoring Committee Members - Your resource - Give us a call with your CSA food questions.

(List suppressed for internet publication - contact Harmony Valley Farm for resource information.)

John, a new member, adds: “This is my first year as a member of a CSA. I had teased myself for three years before finally making the jump. In hoping to eat better, support organic farming, and a host of other reasons; I decided to split a box and an extra salad share with my daughter.

“At first I was surprised at how little was in the box. Then, what do with it? As I became accustomed to the contents and anticipating each delivery, it changed. I look forward to each box of goodies, it’s become part of Saturday and I get to visit my daughter every week.

“It has not been all glamour. My refrigerator has at times taken on an unpleasant odor. Storage has been my biggest problem; I’m embarrassed to admit to what’s ended up in my compost bin. I have come to realize this is a larger life change than anticipated. I am dealing with twenty five years of feeding five people. It started out good in the 70’s but as life got busy and tastes varied, meals became fast and bland. The produce has been a great; it’s hard to imagine what the produce would be like under more ideal weather conditions. When talking to folks who have been doing this for a while I am encouraged by the fact it had taken them time to adjust.

“I’ll be back next year. There will be less in the compost bin. I’ll be ready for the changes in the vegetables as the season moves from spring to fall. I will not romanticize. I look forward to starting again, fewer items will escape me. I even found a friend who would love my burdock root.”

Another HVF veteran, Sheryl, says: “Jim and I joined the CSA because we wanted to improve our eating habits and have access to a variety of high quality organic produce. The first year was somewhat overwhelming. Rutabaga, turnips, kale, burdock, sunchokes, fennel and celeriac were unfamiliar vegetables to both of us. We gradually began to try recipes using these vegetables.

We also gave away some vegetables and stored others so long they were only good for the compost pile. Now, many years later, we have accumulated a collection of recipes that we look forward to using as the seasons change. There’s no more guilt about wasting things, because we generally look forward to everything that appears in the box. We know how to store things and how long they can be stored, and we know which friends will take those extra rutabagas. We don’t like to spend a lot of time cooking, and try to eat as much of the produce as possible uncooked, in salads. Our fall/winter root vegetable casserole

recipes tend to be easy and quick to put together. We make large batches so we can have leftovers later in the week or to put in the freezer. We’re in HVF CSA to stay!”



Here are some other things we’ve thought of as we participated in the CSA adventure:

1. Root veggies are great for soups. Make a HUGE pot and freeze it in individual serving containers. Great for quick and easy lunches and dinners after the veggies stop coming.
2. There are lots of good recipes out there. In addition to the recipes in the news letter and on the HVF website, check out the *Victory Garden Cookbook*. Terrific, easy recipes. Check out Epicurious (<http://eat.epicurious.com/>) on the web and do a recipe search for the vegetable you need to use. Print the recipes you like and put them in your CSA cookbook for next year.
3. If you really don’t like something, leave it in the choice box. Somebody else will want it.
4. Tell everyone you know about the produce you get in your CSA box. Someone you talk to grew up eating some of the things you aren’t ready to deal with or have too much of. They will be glad to take it off your hands!
5. Most important, don’t feel guilty if you have to throw something out. This is a learning experience for all of us. Start a compost pile, so you will actually be using those vegetables.

In case you’d like to talk with someone about ideas for using the veggies, we have included our names and telephone numbers on the front page. We’d be happy to talk with you anytime about how we work to make our CSA experience a delicious and healthful one. We might have just the recipe you need. Or, if you’re just feeling a little down and aren’t as excited about the box as you’d like to be, we’d be happy to chat. Just give us a call! Thanks for your time.