



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

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Welcome to Spring: Featuring Sorrel, Ramps and Nettles

by: Andrea Yoder

Welcome to the 2014 growing season! Spring has taken awhile to come this year, but we're happy to see the trees starting to form buds, the pastures are turning green, and after a long winter we finally have fresh vegetables to harvest again! Spring is a unique time of year in Wisconsin and nature seems to know just what our bodies are craving after a long winter. We thought we'd start off the season by featuring three of our favorite spring vegetables that are included in this week's box—Ramps, Sorrel & Nettles. If you are new to CSA and not familiar with these vegetables, don't worry. We are here to help you discover these three new foods that will hopefully become vegetables you look forward to every spring!

SORREL: Sorrel is unlike any other green we grow. It belongs to the Knotweed family of plants, which also includes such plants as rhubarb and buckwheat. Sorrel is a perennial plant that we look forward to every spring and is amongst the first greens of the season. Sorrel leaves have a pointy arrow shape and are thick in texture and bright green in color. When you take a bite of raw sorrel, you may be surprised by its tart, slightly sour, bright flavor that will certainly wake up your taste buds! Raw sorrel can be tannic and leave your mouth with a dry feeling, similar to drinking a tannic, full-bodied red wine. Therefore, sorrel in its raw form is often used more as a seasoning or to compliment other ingredients. This is a perfect way to use raw sorrel because just a small amount added to a salad, cold sauce or dressing will brighten the whole dish and enhance the overall flavors.

When cooked, sorrel goes through an amazing transformation. It changes from bright green to a muted olive green; cooks who are new to using sorrel will often think they overcooked the green and caused it to become this color, which is what happens with other green vegetables like green beans. Don't worry! This is what is supposed to happen to sorrel when you cook it. The other interesting thing about sorrel is how it "melts" when added to hot liquids. The leaves will almost immediately change color and then start to soften. The longer it's cooked, the more the leaves break apart and you can stir it into a coarse sauce. This is one of the reasons it's often used in soups and sauces.

The tart, citrus-like flavor of sorrel

This Week's Box

NETTLES: You can identify the nettles as the green that is bunched with a twist tie and loosely wrapped in a plastic bag. Please read the nettles portion of the main article for instructions on how to handle them. Some people may be sensitive to their "sting," so handle with care.

OVERWINTERED PARSNIPS: Start your morning off in a sweet way by stirring shredded parsnips into basic pancake batter and top with toasted pecans. Store parsnips in a bag in the refrigerator.

OVERWINTERED SUNCHOKES: Anything you can do with a potato...you can do with a sunchoke, and then some! For starters, substitute sunchoke in place of potatoes in a basic recipe for cream of potato soup. Top it off with chopped chives and you have a tasty bowl of soup for lunch!

RAMPS: Store ramps wrapped in a moist paper towel or in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Start your morning off with ramp scrambled eggs. For lunch, enjoy ramp pesto spread on a ham or turkey salad. If you haven't had enough ramps yet, make a creamy Alfredo pasta sauce with ramps and mushrooms for dinner!

CHIVES: Chives offer the first "onion" taste of spring. Mince them finely and use as a garnish for creamy sunchoke soup, or use them as a garnish on toast spread with goat cheese and freshly ground black pepper. Store in the refrigerator wrapped in a moist paper towel or in a plastic bag.

OVERWINTERED SPINACH: This is the sweetest spinach of the season! Use it as the base of a salad tossed with the sorrel-honey vinaigrette recipe in this week's newsletter.

SORREL: This green is packaged in a clear zipper bag in this week's box. Look for a tasty sorrel-lime cooler recipe in our recipe database on our website. This is a refreshing way to drink your greens!

CHOICE: CURLY WILLOW, PUSSY WILLOW, OR DOGWOOD Please note, the sticks are not edible. We include these different plants in the landscape of our fields to create a natural habitat for our allies in pest control including birds, wasps and other insects. Every winter we prune them and collect the trimmings to bundle and use as decoration. We hope you'll enjoy their beauty in your homes. They do not need to be put in water and will stay nice for a long time.

pairs well with many other spring vegetables such as ramps, asparagus, spinach, sunchoke, and parsnips. The acidity of this green also makes it a natural companion to rich foods such as cream, butter, sour cream, yogurt and fatty fish like salmon and mackerel. Additionally, it pairs well with more "earthy" foods such as lentils, rice, buckwheat, mushrooms and potatoes.

NETTLES: Nettles are another unique perennial green. They grow wild in nature, but we like them so much we actually planted them in our field! They are actually called "stinging nettles" because they have little hair-like stingers on the plant that can cause a stinging sensation on your skin if you touch them before they are cooked. Please don't let this scare you away from eating this delicious green. Our crew harvests the nettles with gloves on, and then we vigorously wash them in a tank of water before we pack them in your boxes. Most of the sting is removed with washing, but to be on the safe side we've put them in a bag for

you. When you are ready to use them, use tongs (or wear gloves) to handle them and always cook them before eating them. If you put them in boiling water for just 30-45 seconds or so, the sting will completely go away. After 30-45 seconds, remove them from the boiling water and run under cold water. Squeeze out the excess water and then take the leaves off the main stem. Discard the stem and use the leaves.

Nettles are very rich in nutrients including vitamins A & C, calcium, magnesium and iron. They are often used to make tea as well as rich, brothy soups with other spring vegetables. You can also use nettles in pasta dishes, mix them into rice dishes, or make a pesto.

RAMPS: Ramps are another perennial spring vegetable that has grown in recognition and popularity over the past 20 years. We harvest the ramps from the woods where they grow on north-facing hillsides. Their leaves resemble a lily leaf, but the lower bulb portion of the ramp is reminiscent of a spring onion or green

garlic. They have a very brief season of availability in the spring usually lasting anywhere from 4-6 weeks.

While ramps do taste similar to garlic or onions, they really have their own distinct “rampy” flavor. The entire plant, greens and the lower white bulb, is edible raw or cooked; all you have to remove is the root base. Ramps pair well with any egg dish such as scrambled eggs, frittatas and quiche. They also pair well with other spring vegetables such as overwintered spinach, asparagus, nettles, and mushrooms. Ramps are delicious when incorporated into risotto, creamy pasta sauce, pestos, and soups.

We’ve included a few recipes in this week’s newsletter to get you started, but if you’re looking for more ideas, we have quite a few recipes available on our website in our searchable recipe database. We hope you enjoy this week’s box and are looking forward to a season of delicious vegetables!

Sorrel-Honey Vinaigrette

by Andrea Yoder

This dressing is excellent on a spinach salad topped with cooked chicken or ham, hard-boiled eggs, toasted pumpkin seeds and other spring vegetables such as radishes and asparagus. You can also use this dressing as a sauce to serve with grilled chicken or chicken tenders, drizzled over pan-seared salmon, or use it in place of mayonnaise to make tuna or chicken salad.

Yield: 1 ½ cups

2 cups sorrel, roughly chopped
2 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
4 tsp honey
½ cup sunflower or olive oil
½-1 tsp salt

1. Put roughly chopped sorrel in the bowl of a food processor and process until coarsely chopped.
2. Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the apple cider vinegar, Dijon mustard, honey, and ½ tsp salt. Process briefly to combine all of the ingredients. With the machine still running, slowly pour the oil into the sorrel mixture. Continue to process until all the oil is incorporated and the dressing is smooth. Taste and add salt if needed.
3. Store the dressing in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Ramp Butter

by: Andrea Yoder

Yield ½ cup

1 stick unsalted butter, softened
½ bunch ramps

1. Soften butter to room temperature.
2. Clean ramps and remove the root end. Roughly chop the ramps (white bulb and green tops) into 1-inch pieces. Place ramps in the bowl of a food processor and process until they are finely chopped. Scrape down the sides of the bowl.
3. Add the butter to the ramps and process just long enough to evenly incorporate the ramps into the butter.
4. Put into a covered bowl and refrigerate until ready for use. Will store for about 1 week in the refrigerator.

This is a super simple, yet delicious way to enjoy the flavor of ramps and can be used in a lot of different ways.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Melt ramp butter in a saute pan and cook your morning eggs in it.
- Put a pat of ramp butter on top of a grilled steak.
- Spread ramp butter on bread and bake it in the oven until the bread is toasted.

Spring Greens Soup

by Andrea Yoder

Yield: 4 servings

1 Tbsp + 1 tsp olive oil
½ cup sunchokes, small dice
1 cup fresh shiitake or cremini mushrooms, thinly sliced
½ bunch of ramps, leaves thinly sliced and bulbs minced
3 cups chicken or vegetable stock
½ cup blanched nettles, roughly chopped (See note below)
½ cup sorrel leaves, thinly sliced
½ cup chives, thinly sliced
Salt, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
Freshly ground white pepper, to taste (optional)
Extra-virgin olive oil, to garnish

1. In a 2 or 3-quart pot, heat 1 Tbsp olive oil over medium heat. Add sunchokes and sauté for about 5-7 minutes or until slightly tender and golden brown.
2. Add 1 tsp more of olive oil to the pan and then add the mushrooms. Stir to combine, then sauté for about 2-3 minutes or until the mushrooms are soft. Add the ramp bulbs to the pan and sauté for 1-2 minutes.
3. Add 3 cups of stock and about 1 tsp salt to the pot. Stir to combine, then cover and bring the soup to a simmer.
4. Add the nettles, sorrel, and ramp leaves to the soup. Stir to combine and season with black and/or white pepper. Simmer the soup, partially covered, for about 10 minutes.
5. Remove the soup from the stove and carefully puree the soup in a blender or with an immersion blender. Once the soup is blended, taste it and adjust the seasoning as needed.
6. Serve hot with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil and freshly chopped chives.

Note: You will need to blanch the nettles before adding them to the soup. You can do this by boiling a small pot of water. Using a tongs to handle the nettles, carefully add them to the boiling water. Leave them in the boiling water for about 30-45 seconds, then lift them out with the tongs and place in a colander or strainer. Run them under cold water until they are cooled. Squeeze out the excess water, then roughly chop them.