



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

May 6-7, 2016

Welcome To The 2016 Season!

Welcome to the 2016 HVF CSA! We're excited to start another season, our 24th to be exact! Our growing season is off to a good start so far. Spring came a little on the early side this year, but we're thankful the ramps held on long enough for us to harvest them for your first box!

Our entire field crew is now back from Mexico and they have been hard at work. In addition to harvesting lots of ramps, they've managed to plant potatoes, 3 plantings of peas, 3 plantings of salad mix, beets, carrots, parsnips and chard. In just a few weeks we'll have radishes, baby kale and more spinach. We even took our chances this week and planted the first corn and beans.

The transplanting crew has already transplanted all the onions as well as the first planting of broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi and spring cabbage. By the end of the week the first kale and collards will be transplanted as well as all of our celeriac! We may even get brave enough to transplant cucumbers and summer squash... with a little field blankie to cover them on chilly nights.

Captain Jack (The Dog) would like to report that the strawberry plants look strong and healthy now that we've pulled back some of the mulch. If you're interested in having a super-awesome, fun day at the farm, mark your calendars for June 19 and plan to join us for our annual Strawberry Day Party! Captain Jack loves CSA events, and this one in particular...in part because of the delicious strawberry ice cream. Richard and John are anxious to show everyone the wood products they've been working on. They'll have a variety of things on display including wooden bowls, bottle stoppers and a few other surprises.

Speaking of calendars...our new 2016 CSA calendar and resource guide is available at your CSA site this week! This year's calendar focuses on a variety of pollinating creatures on our farm. We hope you enjoy the beautiful pictures and use this calendar as a helpful resource to guide you through the season.

This week we are also delivering a variety of decorative willows as a choice item. We plant different types of willow in between our fields to serve as a valuable habitat for small songbirds to nest. They also serve as a pollen and nectar source for some of our beneficial pollinator creatures. We trim a portion of the willows each year, leaving about 50% of the tree for the wild creatures and sending the pieces we trimmed off to you for use as decoration!

This Week's Box

RAMPS: Yes! They held on long enough for the first week! Read this week's newsletter article to learn more about them.

OVERWINTERED PARSNIPS: You'll find spring-dug parsnips to be sweet and delicious. You don't need to do much more than toss them with oil and roast them. You can also let their sweetness work in your favor by incorporating them into baked goods such as cakes, muffins, cookies and even pancakes.

OVERWINTERED SUNCHOKES: We'll be featuring sunchokes in next week's newsletter. Until then, slice thinly and pan-fry until golden brown. Serve them on a burger!

OVERWINTERED SPINACH: Toss spinach with creamy buttermilk ramp dressing and garnish with crumbled bacon. The recipe is on our website.

RHUBARB: Please note, our rhubarb suffered some damage in a hail storm we had this past Tuesday. You might see some surface scarring on the rhubarb. This should not affect usability, but I would recommend using it sooner rather than later.

NETTLES..YES, THE STINGING TYPE: This is the bunched green packaged in a plastic bag. They will sting you if you handle them before cooking them. Please read this week's newsletter article for tips on how to enjoy this vegetable.

WILD RED KALE: This hearty little kale surprised us and overwintered from last fall! Lightly saute along with green garlic or onions. Drizzle with toasted sesame oil.

GREEN GARLIC: You can use the both the top and bottom of the green garlic. Slice thinly and add to soups and salads as a garnish.

CHIVES: Make a smoked salmon chive spread for your morning bagel!

ASPARAGUS: Brush asparagus spears lightly with oil and toss them on the grill. Serve them with a squeeze of lemon and grated cheese for a super-simple side dish.

CHOICE-DECORATIVE WILLOW: We trimmed these decorative branches from our field hedges. They are an important part of our farm ecosystem, and we hope you enjoy their beauty in your home!

Thank you for your support of our farm.
We hope you enjoy the 2016 CSA season!

Your Dedicated Farmers,
Richard & Andrea

Ramps & Nettles...Welcome to Spring!

by Andrea Yoder

I find it rather ironic that we ship food in from faraway lands when we have so much available to us...literally in our back yard! Springtime in our region brings forth a variety of plants that are the first to break free from their winter hibernation and remind us that there is hope for warm days and green food to nourish us. Ramps and nettles are two of our favorite "Wild" spring foods that help us transition from winter to spring.

It's funny to see how both of these vegetables have become more well-known and familiar to many over the past 10-20 years. It is no longer uncommon to see features about ramps and nettles in major culinary magazines such as *Saveur*, *Bon Appetit* and *Food & Wine*. But how did so

many people come to know and appreciate the culinary value in both of these "wild" foods? Well, in the Midwest part of the credit goes to our own Farmer Richard who originally gave ramps away at the farmers' market! That's right, he couldn't sell them so he gave them away with hopes that people would give them a try!

Ramps are the onion-like vegetable in your box that has a bright green, rounded leaf that resembles a lily leaf. The base of the ramp is similar to a green onion, although it becomes more bulb-like as it matures. They are sometimes referred to as "wild leeks" and are found growing on North-facing hillsides early in the spring. They have a short season of availability ranging from 3-4 weeks on average, hence the necessity to get your fill and eat as many as you can when they are in season. When people ask me what a ramp tastes like, I usually just tell them the taste is, well, RAMPY! While they can be used in ways similar to a green onion, they are special in their own way. Some of the most common ways to use ramps include

making pesto or incorporating them into pasta and egg dishes. Ramps do pair well with other spring vegetables and foods such as spinach, mushrooms, sorrel and nettles. They also pair well with eggs, cream, cheese, bacon, roasted & grilled meats to name just a few.

Ramps, and the leaves in particular, are delicate and should be eaten sooner than later. Store ramps in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. If you are going to keep ramps for several days, it's a good idea to wrap the leaves in a paper towel to absorb excess moisture. You can use the entire ramp with the exception of the small root end which should be trimmed away. The leaves can be used to make pesto, added to salads, wilted into eggs, pasta, soup, etc. If you do a quick internet search you'll find a plethora of recipes to fit your fancy including ramp gravy to serve over biscuits, bacon & ramp vinaigrette, dumplings, potstickers and more!

So now on to nettles. Let's get the uncomfortable part of this conversation out of the way first. Yes they are the stinging kind, which is why we put them in a plastic bag for you. Nettles are the bunched green that has pointy leaves, is dark green in color and is packaged in a plastic bag. Nettles have little fibers on the stems that contain formic acid which will give you a "stinging" sensation if you touch them before they are cooked. This is their own built-in defense mechanism which helps them survive in the wild. We wash them vigorously before we pack them in your box and did put them in a plastic bag so you can handle them pain-free until you cook them. Vigorous washing helps take some of the sting away, but we still recommend you only eat them after cooking. You only need to cook them in boiling water for a 1-2 minutes to remove the sting. After that you can handle them with your bare hands without a problem. When I prepare nettles, I first put on a pot of water, cover it and bring the water to a boil. Next, I prepare a sink of cold, clean water. Using the bag to hold onto the stems of the bunch, I carefully remove the twist tie and drop the nettles in a sink of water. I use a pair of tongs to swish the nettles for a final washing. When the water is boiling, use the tongs to transfer the nettles from the sink to the pot of boiling water. Boil for 1-2 minutes. You'll notice the color will change from a bright green color to a gorgeous emerald color. Carefully remove the nettles from the pot of water, put in a colander and run cold water over them to stop the cooking. Note, do not discard the cooking water. Once cooled, squeeze the nettles to remove excess water. Now they are ready for use. You can remove the leaves from the main stem, or chop the stem finely and use everything.

Once cooked, you can do many things with nettles. You can use them anywhere you might use cooked spinach in dishes such as lasagna, scrambled eggs, quiche, etc. They are often enjoyed in soup, but can also be blended to make a delicious pesto or a puree that can be incorporated into pasta dough to make a gorgeous green pasta! You'll find them to taste similar to spinach.....but much better!

Remember I told you to save the cooking water? The reason I suggested this is because that cooking water can be consumed as a tea! Now is the perfect time to mention that nettles are a very nutrient-dense vegetable that is often used medicinally because of its excellent contributions to health. They are high in calcium, magnesium, potassium, boron, carotenoids, iron and more. They are also reported to be anti-inflammatory, relieve eczema and decrease the histamine response associated with allergic reactions.

Nettle and Ramp Pesto

1 bunch nettles
2 cups ramps, packed
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp salt
2+½ Tbsp nutritional yeast or Parmesan cheese
¼ cup soaked walnuts

1. Blanch the nettles in boiling water for 1-2 minutes. Drain and rinse with cold water.
2. Squeeze the water out of the nettles (you'll be left with maybe ½ cup).
3. Place all ingredients except walnuts in a food processor, blend until smooth. Add walnuts (or other desired nut) and pulse until nuts are in small pieces. Have a spoon handy to relish this wild pesto!

Author's Note: "You can use pesto on pasta, in sandwiches and burgers, pizza or mini vegetable-pizza, in salad dressings, in soups or sauces, or, of course, by itself."

Recipe borrowed from Naomi and her blog, *AlmostBananas*.

Creamy Nettles Dip with Roasted Garlic

1 cup blanched nettles
2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
5 cloves roasted garlic or a few green garlic leaves
¼ cup fresh mint leaves
1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
Cayenne pepper, a dash or to taste (optional)
1 tsp sea salt, plus more to taste
¾ cup Greek yogurt (creme fraiche or sour cream will also work)

1. Put the nettles into a food processor and blend until roughly chopped.
2. Add the rest of the ingredients and blend until smooth.
3. Taste and adjust seasoning. You may need to add a little more lemon juice, salt or an extra dash of cayenne pepper.

Author's Note: "This is so quick to make, and tastes fantastic.....there are so many uses for this nettles dip once you make it. I have even made a thinned-out version into a nice, cool soup."

Recipe borrowed from Ariana Mullins blog, *And Here We Are.....tasting and discovering this beautiful world*.