



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com

May 10-11, 2019

This Week's Featured Vegetables: Stinging Nettles & Wild Ramps-- The Wild Things!

Spring has a beautiful way of nourishing us and giving us just what we need, even when we don't know we need it! The first of our double-vegetable feature this week is **Stinging Nettles**. We wild harvest them on our farm, but also plant them in the field. They need to be handled carefully, especially before they are washed and cooked. They have little fibers on the stems that contain several different compounds including formic acid, which will give you a "stinging" sensation if you touch them with your bare skin. *"Why are you giving me a vegetable that will sting me?! Are you trying to kill me?!"* No, quite the contrary!

Nettles are very nutrient dense and we consider them to be a *"Wisconsin Super Food."* They help our bodies wake up after a long, cold wet winter and help us purify our blood and cleanse our bodies. They have anti-inflammatory and anti-histamine properties. They are high in protein as well as carotenoids, chlorophyll, iron, calcium, magnesium, zinc, potassium, selenium and vitamins B, C, D and K. Wow—that's a lot of nutritional goodness in one plant! Nettles give us that jump start we need in the spring and, they also taste great! Cooking destroys the stingers so you can then safely handle them with bare hands. We recommend cooking them before eating. They have a rich flavor similar to spinach, but even better! So no, we are not trying to harm you. Rather, our intention is to give you something delicious and nourishing.

Here are some recommendations for handling them. First, many of these stingers are removed with vigorous washing, which we've already done for you. Even though we've washed them, I would still recommend you handle them carefully and avoid touching with bare hands prior to cooking. Some people are more sensitive to their sting than others, which is why we've also put them in a plastic bag to make it easier to get them home without touching them. You can use the bag as your "glove" to hold the bottom of the bunch while you carefully remove the twist tie. We do recommend you wash them in a sink of water after you've removed the twist tie. While you are washing them, bring a big pot of water to a boil. Transfer the nettles from the sink

What's In The Box?

WILD RAMPS: There are 2 bunches of ramps in your box this week. They have long, rounded lily-like leaves. This is one of our featured vegetables this week, so read on for more information!

OVERWINTERED SPINACH: This spinach was planted in the field last fall. It survived the polar vortex and we are now harvesting the new growth off those plants. This spinach has thick, tender leaves and is some of the most flavorful you'll eat this season!

OVERWINTERED PARSNIPS: These were stored in the field over the winter and harvested early in April. They are noticeably sweeter than ones dug in the fall. They do have some browning on the surface after hanging out in the ground through the winter. Just peel away the skin and they'll be snow white inside.

CHIVES: Chives are a perennial crop, meaning they come back year after year. Store them in the refrigerator wrapped in a moist towel to keep them from wilting.

ORANGE CARROTS: We harvested these in October 2018 and held them in cold storage over the winter. It was a gamble, but they actually stored very well and are still solid, sweet and delicious! They do have some browning on the surface due to their long storage. You can either ignore it or peel it away.

NETTLES: The more proper name for this vegetable is "Stinging Nettles." This is the dark green, bunched vegetable that is in a clear plastic bag. **Before you open the bag, please read this week's vegetable feature for important information about how to handle and prepare them.**

GREEN GARLIC: This vegetable resembles a green onion, except the leaves are flat. You can use both the base, stem and the leaves.

ASPARAGUS: Just in time for the first box! Keep the base of the stems in water until ready to use.

CHOICE: DECORATIVE WILLOW—We plant curly willow and several varieties of pussy willow in our hedge rows in the field. These trees bring beauty to our farm, but also provide habitat for birds and are a pollen source for wasps, bees, etc. You don't need to put them in water.

CHOICE: CALENDARS—Make sure you pick up one of our beautiful CSA Calendars at your site! They are FREE and contain a lot of valuable information and resources to help you have a fun and successful CSA season! We have extras, so feel free to take more than one!

to the boiling water using a pair of tongs. Boil them for 2-3 minutes and then transfer to a bowl of ice water to cool them. Now you can handle them with your bare hands.

Some of the lower portion of the stems may be tough, so only use the leaves and tender upper stem portions. You can pluck or cut these off the main stem after they are cooked. Alternatively, you can hold each stem (with your gloved/bagged hand) and use a pair of scissors to snip the tender leaves off the main stem before you cook them. **Check out the blog post we did on May 10, 2018 which demonstrates these processes and includes pictures.**

Nettle leaves are perishable, so it is best to cook them shortly after you receive them. It is better to store them in their cooked form for a few days until ready for use. The cooking water makes a beautiful tea, so don't discard it. You can drink the tea either hot or cold and mixed with honey and lemon. The water can also be used to cook pasta, rice, etc. Nettles are often used to make soup, but you can also use them in pesto, or risotto and pasta dishes. Nettles may be substituted for spinach in any recipe calling for cooked spinach. They pair well with eggs, dairy, mushrooms, asparagus and other spring greens.

The second part of our feature is **Wild Ramps!** Ramps are one of the first green things to pop up in the spring. They have a very short season lasting, at most, 4-5 weeks. They have a unique flavor that is kind of oniony-garlicky, but honestly the best way to describe it is simply rampy. They resemble a green onion, except they have tender, delicate lily-like leaves. Ramps grow in the woods and, while they can be replanted to establish new patches, it takes a very long time for them to multiply and spread. Many, us included, are concerned about the sustainability of ramps. Because they take so long to multiply and replenish, it's important to be mindful when harvesting them. Ramps grow in clumps and we're careful to only take about half the clump while leaving the other half undisturbed. **If you'd like to learn more about our harvest practices, please read our blog post from April 20, 2017.**

Ramps may be eaten raw or cooked. When raw they can be quite pungent, but the flavor mellows with cooking. You can eat both leaves and the lower bulb. Just trim away the roots. Some popular ways to use ramps include risotto and pasta dishes. Ramps also pair well with eggs in scrambles, frittatas and quiche. Ramp pesto is another great way to use this vegetable and it's our featured ramp recipe this week. Ramps pair well with cream, cheese, bacon and other spring vegetables including mushrooms, asparagus, nettles and spinach.

The leaves on ramps are the most perishable part and should be used within a few days. To store ramps, wrap the bunch in a damp paper or linen towel and keep them in the refrigerator.

If you're looking for more recipe and use ideas for these two spring treats, check out the **recipe archive on our website** or see this week's **Cooking With the Box** article on our blog. We hope you enjoy these spring treasures!

Nettle Chips

Yield: 2 cups

1 bunch nettles
2 Tbsp olive oil

1 Tbsp soy sauce or coconut aminos
Salt, to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 300°F.
2. Wash the nettles in a sink of cold water. Using gloves or a bag over your hand, take the nettle stems out of the water and place them on a towel. Gently pat them dry.
3. Using a scissors, trim the tender leaves and upper stem off the main stem. Put all of the trimmed leaves into a mixing bowl.
4. Drizzle the leaves with oil and soy sauce or coconut aminos. Using a tongs, toss the leaves to thoroughly coat them with the oil and soy sauce mixture.
5. Spread the leaves on a non-stick baking sheet (or use parchment paper). If you use low-sodium soy sauce or coconut aminos, you'll want to season the nettles lightly with a sprinkling of salt. If you use full sodium soy sauce, you may not need additional salt.
6. Bake in the oven for 20-30 minutes or until crisp. You will need to turn them once about halfway through baking. Try to separate the leaves as best you can so they bake more evenly.
7. Remove from the oven and cool. Taste one and add additional salt if needed. They are best eaten immediately.

Note: If you have leftovers, crush the chips and use them as a topping to sprinkle on top of salads, eggs or buttered toast.
Recipe by Chef Andrea

Ramp Pesto

Yield: 1-1 ½ cups

1 bunch ramps, cleaned
½ cup toasted almonds or pine nuts
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup grated Parmesan cheese (or other hard cheese)
3-5 tsp fresh lemon juice
Salt and black pepper, to taste

1. Cut the leaves off the ramps. Roughly chop the leaves and set them aside.
2. Put the ramp bulbs and nuts in the bowl of a food processor and coarsely chop them. Add the cheese, ¼ tsp salt, black pepper, 3 tsp lemon juice and the ramp leaves. Continue to process the contents while slowly pouring in the olive oil.
3. Taste the pesto and adjust the seasoning with more salt, pepper and lemon juice to brighten it up.
4. Store in a glass jar in the refrigerator. It's best to pour a little extra olive oil over the top of the jar to preserve the color of the pesto.

Note: If you do not have a food processor, you can also make pesto in a blender. Of course people used to make pesto before the invention of electronic appliances, so you could also just use a knife and finely chop all the ingredients.

Ramp Pesto Serving Suggestions:

- Toss a few spoonfuls with hot pasta
- Stir into scrambled eggs
- Use ramp pesto as the base for a delicious homemade pizza topped with mushrooms, bacon, prosciutto, mozzarella, etc.
- Spread on toast or a bagel with fresh ricotta or cream cheese
- Stir a spoonful into mayonnaise and use it as a sandwich spread or dipping sauce
- Baste grilled or roasted chicken with pesto
- Serve with seared salmon

Recipe by Chef Andrea