



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

www.harmonyvalleyfarm.com

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## VEGETABLE FEATURE: SWEET PEPPERS

by Andrea Yoder

As we continue our progression through the seasons, we are approaching another transition point. Within the season of "Summer," I feel like there are sub seasons. Zucchini and cucumbers mark the beginning of summer. Tomatoes take center stage in mid-summer, and peppers close it out. For me, the peak of the pepper season is one of the markers that late summer is upon us and will very soon be colliding with fall. Peppers are one of my favorite vegetables to grow and eat and they so gracefully represent this unique point in our growing season. They pair well with all of the summer vegetables we still have available, such as tomatoes and eggplant. They also pair nicely with fall cauliflower, winter squash, sweet potatoes, potatoes and fall greens such as broccoli raab.

This week we're focusing on sweet peppers, of which we grow several different types. Before I go on, I want to mention that all peppers start out as green peppers when they are immature. While we eat green peppers, peppers are actually fully ripe and at their peak of sweetness and flavor if we let them turn color to be fully red, yellow or orange. Most people are familiar with the standard bell pepper, which holds an important place in our pepper lineup as an early season green pepper. Once we start seeing some color in the field as peppers ripen, we move on to more interesting varieties such as Italian frying peppers. Italian frying peppers are long, slender peppers that, despite their name, may be eaten either raw or cooked. We have both red and orange varieties, and both have pretty good pepper flavor and sweetness. One of our other unique sweet pepper varieties is the Ukraine pepper. This is a pepper for which we have saved our own seed for several decades. It's actually not available commercially and we got the seed from

## What's In The Box?

**YELLOW ONIONS:** We are happy to report that all the onions have been cleaned and safely tucked away in the cooler for storage until the end of the year! This week's onion is a Spanish variety, known for being a more mild, sweeter onion.

**ORANGE CARROTS:** Here's your weekly supply of carrots to add to soups, stews, salads or just eat them raw dipped in peanut butter or your favorite salad dressing!

**RED PRAIRIE POTATOES:** We're nearly finished harvesting all the potatoes for the season! This week we're sending one of our early varieties that has red skin and white flesh. This is a waxy potato that is perfect for roasting, pan-frying, boiling, or adding to soups and chowders.

**VARIETY BAG OF TOMATOES:** We've done our best to carefully pick and pack these delicate tomatoes. As we pass them on into your care, we encourage you to unpack them and lay them out to ripen at room temperature. Monitor them carefully and if you see any spots starting to form, it's time to eat or cook that tomato.

**SWEET CORN:** We are nearing the end of sweet corn season but hope to pull off one or two more deliveries! Kudos to Richard, Rafael, and Mother Nature for a steady supply of corn this year! Don't forget that the cobs have flavor too and may be used to make a tasty vegetable broth.

**SWEET PEPPERS:** This week's colorful sweet pepper selections may include Red and/or Orange Italian Frying Peppers, Orange Ukraine or Red Bell Peppers.

**RED SEEDLESS WATERMELON:** It has been a bountiful watermelon season and we're still going strong! You may choose to eat the sweet, red flesh right out of the rind, or use it to make a savory salad along with tomatoes, onions, and fresh basil.

**WHITE, PURPLE OR YELLOW CAULIFLOWER OR BROCCOLI ROMANESCO:** Your box will contain one of these selections this week. While our fall brassicas are coming in ahead of schedule, they do pair nicely with sweet peppers in soups, stir-fries, etc. Store these items in the refrigerator and eat within a few days for optimal quality.

**JALAPEÑO PEPPER:** We've included your weekly hot pepper again this week to meet your needs for just a little heat added to soups, stews, salsa, etc. If you can get your hands on some fresh peaches, make a **Peach, Tomato, Jalapeño Chutney!**

**PORCELAIN GARLIC:** A touch of garlic every day is a great way to boost your immunity. Incorporate garlic into breakfast by making **Charred Tomatoes with Fried Egg on Garlic Toast.**

**GREEN TOP RED BEETS:** Beet greens and chard may be used interchangeably or together in recipes. When we leave the tops on the beets, you get a bonus bunch of greens! That's your cue to eat the beet greens instead of composting them!

**BROCCOLI RAAB:** Broccoli Raab is a bunching green characterized by little broccoli-like florets. The florets and leaves are edible and have a mild mustard flavor.

**BONUS--RED GRAPE TOMATOES OR BROCCOLI:** Your box will contain one of these bonus items as space allows.

someone who brought it from Ukraine. We like this pepper because it's a heavy producer, often with as many as twelve peppers per plant. This pepper resembles a bell pepper, but they are smaller and have a pointy bottom instead of a blocky bottom. They also ripen to more of an orange red color instead of bright red. They have a thick wall which makes them a good candidate for roasting. They're also a good pepper to use for stuffed peppers.

We also grow mini sweet peppers which are our all-time favorite sweet variety. While there are many snack peppers available in the marketplace today, we believe our peppers are more flavorful than commercial seed varieties. We've been saving our own seed for well over 15 years and our variety is not just carefully selected, but also well adapted to our area.

While sweet peppers are delicious eaten raw, they may also be sautéed and roasted. You can roast peppers, whole, over an open flame such as on a grill or just on your stovetop if you have gas burners. Otherwise, peppers may be roasted under a broiler in the oven. When roasting peppers, you want to blacken nearly the entire exterior of the pepper. Once blackened, put them in a bowl and cover them so they steam for about 10 minutes. Remove the cover and once they are cool enough to handle you can peel away the black skin. Once you have roasted the pepper, it's ready to use however you'd like. Slices of roasted red pepper are a nice addition to sandwiches, grain, or lentil salads, or use them to build an antipasto platter. You can also use roasted sweet peppers to make a delicious cream sauce, dressing or soup.

While pepper season usually lasts several weeks, peppers are one of the easiest vegetables to preserve and it's worth putting some away to use throughout the winter. I use them quite often in winter stir-fries, as a pizza topping, added to soups and stews, and scrambled eggs, etc. Even if I am limited on time, I know I can always successfully freeze peppers as they do not need to be cooked before freezing. At a minimum, freezing peppers requires the time it takes to wash the pepper and put it in a bag. If I have a little extra time, and to save some freezer space, I'll actually remove the stem and seeds and cut them into smaller pieces. Really, it's that simple and you'll really appreciate having them in the dead of winter!

Peppers are high in vitamins A & C as well as a whole host of other phytonutrients, so munching on a sweet pepper also has nutritive benefits. As far as storage goes, peppers are best held at a warmer temperature of 45-60 degrees. We recognize very few homes have this perfect storage environment, so we recommend you do your best. Personally, I choose to store them at room temperature. If you choose to put them in the refrigerator, I'd encourage you to use them within a few days as they can get cold injury with prolonged time at cold temperatures. Sometimes my peppers start to dehydrate and get soft and wrinkly. This does not mean the pepper is bad, it may have just lost some moisture. If this happens to you, don't throw it out, rather use it in a cooked preparation such as soup or if you want to use it raw, do so to make a pepper puree or pepper sauce.

### **Penne Pasta with Roasted Red Peppers and Almonds**

Yield: 4 servings

¾ pound penne pasta

4 colored sweet peppers, halved and seeded\*

¾ cup pitted kalamata olives

½ cup coarsely chopped roasted almonds

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves

Salt and black pepper, to taste

1. Cook the pasta according to the package directions. Reserve ½ cup of the cooking water; drain the pasta and return it to the pot.
2. Meanwhile, heat broiler. Place the peppers, skin-side up, on a baking sheet and broil until blackened, 8-10 minutes. When the peppers are cool enough to handle, scrape away the blackened skins with a knife and discard. Cut the flesh into 1-inch pieces.
3. Add the peppers, olives, almonds, olive oil, thyme, 2 Tbsp of the reserved cooking water, ½ tsp salt and ¼ tsp black pepper to the pasta and toss to combine. Add more cooking water if the pasta seems dry and adjust the seasoning to your liking. Serve while warm.

**\*Note:** If you have a gas stove, you can leave the peppers whole and char them directly over a high flame, turning them frequently with tongs until they are blackened.

Recipe borrowed from *Real Simple: Easy, Delicious Home Cooking*.