



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

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Spring CSA Boxes are Here!

by: Andrea Yoder

I have never been so hungry for spring as I am this year! While we appreciate the delicious sweet rutabagas, solid turnips, heads of cabbage, canned tomatoes and frozen corn that we've been eating all winter, I admit there came a point about the middle of April when I had had enough! I have been dreaming of grilled asparagus, zesty sorrel soup, rich nettle broth, peppery watercress salads and the distinct aroma of a ramp. Spring is definitely late this year, but we finally have something green on our plates!

Spring is a time of renewal and cleansing after a long winter. It's time to shed the layers and renew our bodies, minds and spirits. Our hillsides and pastures seemed to turn green overnight as the warmth of spring and the bright sunshine have finally brought our valley out of hibernation. Many plants that are available in the spring are rich in minerals and nutrients that support our bodies, cleanse our organs and detoxify our systems. While our food choices may be more limited in the spring, there are still many rich sources of nourishment available to us...even with a late spring in Wisconsin. This week's box may feel light when you pick it up, but it's dense in nutrients and flavor.

If you aren't a seasoned CSA veteran, you may be looking at this odd assortment of vegetables in your box this week and wonder "What are these things and what am I supposed to do with them?" Don't worry, we're here to help and hopefully can provide you with some ideas and recipes to get started. Let's start with **Ramps**. Look for the vegetable in your box that is in a bunch and resembles a green onion on the bottom with a lily leaf on top. Ramps grow wild in the woods on north-facing wooded hillsides. They are one of the first signs of life on the forest floor in the spring and have a very short season of availability ranging from 3-4 weeks. Ramps are similar in flavor to garlic or onions, yet have their own distinctive aroma and flavor. If you nibble on a raw ramp bulb, you may find it to be a bit pungent. This is actually a good quality if you are using a few bulbs to add some zing to a creamy buttermilk dressing or to a ramp pesto. If you cook ramps briefly, the flavor will mellow. Ramp leaves are rather perishable, so make sure you store them in a closed container or a plastic bag until you are ready to use them so they don't dry out and wilt. You really should try to use them within 4-5 days. You can eat nearly the entire plant. Trim off the root end and wash the ramps in cold water to remove any dirt from the surface or between the stems. Separate the onion-like bulb from the stem of the leaf.

This Week's Box

SORREL: Bright green pointy leaves with a lemony flavor. Make a creamy sorrel sauce for fish.

NETTLES: Cook the nettles and use them to top a white pizza or lasagna with white sauce and mushrooms.

SUNCHOKES: Cut into chunks, toss with oil and herbs of your choosing and roast them until they are fluffy and tender.

BLACK RADISH: Cut into a small dice and mix into cream cheese along with chives, salt and pepper. Use as a sandwich spread.

CHIVES: If you don't use all of these within the next week, slice them thinly and dehydrate them for later use.

PARSNIPS: Simmer in milk until tender. Puree in a food processor along with butter, cream, salt and pepper until smooth.

RAMPS: The season is short, so enjoy them now! Use the leaves to make ramp pesto for pasta salad or as a pizza topping.

CHOICE: Curly Willow, Pussy Willow or Dogwood—Note, do not eat the sticks. :) We use these plants in our fields to create beneficial habitat for birds and insects. Every year we trim them back and bunch the sticks for use as a decorative. They make a beautiful display, are very low maintenance, and never have to be watered. Enjoy!

If you are cooking them, you'll want to cook the bottom portion a little bit longer than the greens. Add the greens right at the end of cooking. Ramps pair well with any kind of egg preparation (scrambled, quiche, hard-boiled, custard, etc); dairy (cream, milk, cheese, etc); and other spring vegetables including spinach, sorrel, chives, nettles, and mushrooms.

Sorrel is an interesting spring green recognized by its long, pointy bright green leaves. If you eat a little bit of the raw leaf, you'll notice it has a zingy lemon-like flavor. Sorrel may be eaten raw or cooked. In its raw form, sorrel is best mixed with other greens and will impart a bright, tart lemony flavor to salads. A unique characteristic of sorrel is that it can make its own sauce when it comes in contact with hot liquid. When you add the sorrel leaves to a hot sauce or soup base, the leaves will literally melt into the liquid and make a smooth sauce. While this green is a bright green color when it is raw, the color will change to an olive green when you cook it. Don't worry, you didn't do anything wrong, that is the color it is supposed to be. Sorrel is often used in soups and to make sauces for fish and poultry or on top of egg dishes. Sorrel pairs well with eggs, cream and milk, other spring greens such as spinach and watercress, potatoes, sunchoke, and fish.

This week you will find **nettles** in your box. We look forward to spring nettles every year as they are one of the most nutrient-dense spring greens we have available early in the season and contain protein, calcium, magnesium, potassium, boron, carotenoids and iron. *Please be forewarned that these nettles are the "stinging nettles" many might consider a weed. They have little fibers on*

the stems that contain formic acid which will give you a "stinging" sensation if you brush up against them before they've been washed or try to harvest them with bare hands. Washing the nettles will remove most of the stinging fibers and there is no sting remaining after they are cooked. We have vigorously washed the nettles in your box and put them in a bag to make handling easier for you. Even though we've washed them, I would still recommend you handle them carefully and avoid touching them with your bare hands prior to cooking them. There are several easy ways to handle them in your kitchen. First, put some cold water in your kitchen sink and empty the bag of nettles into the sink. Use either a pair of kitchen tongs, kitchen gloves, or a plastic bag inverted over your hand to handle the nettles until they are cooked. Swish the nettles around in the sink. Remove the nettles from the cold water in the sink using your tongs or gloved hand and put them directly into a pot of boiling water. You should boil them for about 1 minute. You'll notice their color will intensify to a beautiful deep emerald green and the water will turn the same color. After one minute, remove the nettles from the boiling water, put them in a strainer, and rinse with cold water until they are cooled. The stinging factor is no longer a concern after cooking, so you can use your bare hands to squeeze all the excess water out of them and remove the leaves from the thicker stems. If the stems are small, there's no need to sort them out. Now your nettle greens are ready for use. Nettle leaves are perishable, so it is best to cook them shortly after you receive them. Even if you don't want to eat them right away, it is better to store them in their cooked form for a few

days until you are ready to use them. The cooking water actually makes a beautiful tea, so don't discard it. You can drink the tea either hot or cold and mixed with honey and lemon. It's delicious and makes the cooking process dual purpose. Nettles actually originated in Europe and Asia, so they are a familiar vegetable in many of the cuisines from these regions. They are often used to make soups, but you can also use the nettles in a pesto, to top off a pizza, or incorporated into a risotto. Nettle puree may be used in pasta or gnocchi dough to make a stunning appearance, or the nettles can be used in a ravioli filling. Nettles pair well with cheese, cream, mushrooms and other spring greens.

We've rounded out your box this week with some roots. **Sunchokes** and **parsnips** have the unique ability to overwinter in the ground. The cold ground actually makes overwintered parsnips very sweet and delicious. Unfortunately we had a tough winter this year and the parsnips did not overwinter as well as they have in some years. Your parsnips may not look too pretty, but I am certain you'll find them to be the sweet-

est parsnips of the season and very edible! They are great roasted, turned into a puree or used in a soup. Sunchoke are very similar to a potato and can be used in much the same way. Sunchoke are also delicious roasted or in soup. Check out our recipes on-line and search for a sunchoke-chive soup recipe. Sunchoke can also be pickled, which make a crunchy snack or condiment for sandwiches, roasted meats, etc. They contain a non-digestible fiber called inulin. If you haven't eaten sunchoke previously, I'd recommend you start with a small portion. Some individuals are sensitive to the inulin and may have some intestinal discomfort if they eat too many at a time.

We've included the mysterious **Black Spanish Storage Radish** this week as well. We harvested these last year in late October/early November and they still look just as good as the day we brought them in! Black radishes have a stronger, more pungent flavor. If you are a radish lover, then this is the radish for you. If you find black radishes to be a little too strong for your liking, you can slice them thinly and soak them in salted wa-

ter for at least an hour. After soaking them, drain off the water and rinse. This process will help to mellow the intensity. Traditionally, black radishes are mixed with sour cream or cream cheese and the mixture is spread on rye bread. You can also use them to make some creative spring salads, or as an accompaniment or condiment alongside other salads, roasted meats, etc.

Our overwintered spinach crop did not fare well this year. It's still small, but we are hoping to harvest it for you soon. Asparagus is starting to poke through the ground, so we're hoping to have enough to include that in your boxes soon as well. Our spring planted greens (arugula, salad mix, sauté mix and spinach) were planted over a week ago and are looking good. We're looking forward to harvesting those crops as well as baby bok choy, hon tsai tai and baby white turnips within about 3-4 weeks. Despite a late spring and a slow start to the season, we are excited to see the new growth. We hope you enjoy the selections in this week's box and look forward to more to come!

Cornmeal Crusted Cast-Iron-Skillet Trout with Wilted Ramps and Spring Tartar Sauce

This recipe was inspired by Andrea Reusing's campfire version of Trout with wilted ramps that was published in her book entitled *Cooking in the Moment, A Year of Seasonal Recipes*.

Serves 2

Freshly ground black pepper	Vegetable Oil, as needed
1 tsp salt	1 bunch ramps
½ cup cornmeal	Red Wine Vinegar, just a few splashes
Two trout fillets (6-8 ounces each)	Spring Tartar Sauce (recipe below)

1. Preheat a medium-large cast iron skillet over medium-high heat. While the skillet is preheating, mix the salt and black pepper with the cornmeal and put it in a shallow bowl or on a plate.
2. Thoroughly coat each fish fillet with the seasoned cornmeal. When the skillet is hot, add enough oil to the pan to generously coat the bottom of the pan and make it shimmer. Test the oil by sprinkling a little bit of cornmeal in the oil. It should immediately sizzle, but not burn. Shake any excess cornmeal from the fish and slowly lay them in the skillet, skin side up (if you chose to leave the skin on).
3. Cook the fish for 4-6 minutes on each side, or until crispy and golden brown, then flip the fillets over to brown the other side. If the pan becomes dry during cooking, add a small amount of additional oil to the skillet. When both sides of the fish are golden brown, remove them from the pan and put them on a plate. Hold them in a warm place while you cook the ramps.
4. Wash and dry 1 bunch of ramps. Trim off the root end and discard. Cut the lower white portion of the ramps into 1-inch pieces. Cut the leaves into bite sized pieces and keep separate.
5. When the fish filets are finished cooking, remove them from the pan and add a little more oil if needed. Put the ramp bulb pieces in the pan and season well with salt and pepper. As they begin to cook, turn them frequently with tongs as they soften. After 2-3 minutes, add the leaves and turn them as they begin to wilt, which will take just a few minutes. Add a splash of red wine vinegar and cook for another minute or two or until the ramp bulbs are tender and all the leaves are wilted. Remove from the pan and serve alongside the cornmeal crusted trout. Top the fish with "Spring Tartar Sauce."

Spring Tarter Sauce

Yields 1 Cup

½ cup chives, cut thinly	Zest and juice of one lemon
1 cup sorrel leaves, sliced into thin strips	2 Tbsp olive or sunflower oil
½ cup mayonnaise	¾ tsp Salt
	Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Combine all ingredients in a food processor. Process until the mixture is well combined. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed.
2. Chill until you are ready to serve it. This sauce is good with seafood, but can also be used as a dip for other vegetables or a sandwich spread.

Sorrel-Lime Cooler

Recipe adapted from *Martha Stewart Living* magazine

Serves 4

¼ cup maple syrup	4 limes, plus 4 thin rounds for garnish
½ cup water	40 ounces seltzer, chilled
1 cup thinly sliced sorrel leaves	

1. In a blender, combine maple syrup, water, sorrel leaves and the juice of the 4 limes. Puree until smooth.
2. If you would like to have a clear drink, strain the mixture through a fine sieve into a bowl and discard the solids.
3. Divide the sorrel mixture amongst 4 glasses and pour in 8-10 ounces of seltzer. Serve with a lime garnish.

Note: This is a very refreshing drink that even the kids will love. This would also be nice with a splash of Gin (for the adults).