



News
from

Harmony Valley Farm

An Update for Our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

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From Drought to Drown

Weather is always unpredictable, and this spring is no exception. Here in Vernon county we have gone from more than 10 months of moisture shortage to one of the wettest month of May on record. I guess that means the drought is over and monsoon season has arrived. We have also gone from warmer than average days to near record cold several times in the past month. All the extremes really do have an effect on the crops and the progress of planting and harvests, including future harvests as far away as fall.

Here's a little recap of weather effects. April was a continuation of the drought. It was warmer than average and with little precipitation in the air and no mud in the ground we were able to plant and transplant whenever we needed to. Early seeded crops include salad mix, spinach, peas, cilantro, beets, parsnips and parsley root, carrots, beans, corn, edamame and radishes. The April and early May plantings of all those crops came up and look great thanks to careful timing to take advantage of the few showers and careful planting to put the seeds at just the right depth to reach moisture, but not too deep where they won't be able to sprout up to the surface.

The transplanted crops that went in early were slow to grow. We think it was because the soil was just so dry. The plants neither died nor thrived, but they did all get transplanted in a timely way, before they outgrew their tiny greenhouse containers and became stressed. So, overall, we are very satisfied with the early broccolis, cauliflowers, kohlrabies and lettuces. However, the warm dry spring favored the number one pest of broccolis and their relatives, the dreaded flea beetle. This beetle is responsible for the lacy, shotgun-like holes in some of the salad greens, as well. If the population of this tiny leaf eater is allowed to get out of hand, it can not only make

salad mix greens so ugly as to be unharvestable, it can actually kill small plants and set back large ones severely. We have had to resort to botanical sprays several times this season already, to save the cole crops. We have had to religiously cover the vulnerable salad greens with cloth row cover to prevent the beetles from reaching the tender seedlings. Both processes are expensive and time consuming. Either can fail to work adequately. Both are very necessary.

So, April and early May were mostly good to us. We were getting our work done ahead of schedule, just racing to keep up with all the farming tasks possible under clear skies. Then came the rains and the cold fronts, and the resulting hail and high winds. Richard's weather diary notes 8.6 inches since May 8. Over 5 inches of that moisture came in a 72 hour rain marathon and caused rivers to rise out of their banks and the soil to become completely unable to absorb any more. Our Bad Axe River, while high, did not reach flood stage, our spring creek managed to break one of the beaver's dams, but did no more damage than that. Parts of our fields, however, did look like shallow lakes for a little while. We dug some ditches to encourage the water to flow away.

In most ways you have to say we were lucky. The hail must have been small and only seemed to slightly damage the spinach crop we bunched for you this week. We have been planting our crops on raised beds for a couple years and in the drought you wonder why. The flooding fields gave us a vivid answer. Our plants stood up above the puddles in all but the worst places. And, this week, with scattered thundershowers still predicted we escaped with only a tenth of an inch. We are back to transplanting and Greg managed to get the weekly crop of spinach, salad and cilantro seeded!

See back--

This Week's Box

Asparagus
Cilantro
Green Garlic
Pea Vine in a bunch
Radishes
Rhubarb
Salad Mix
Spinach - in a bunch
Winter Onions

Choice items vary, check the choice box.

Yes, there are Salad Shares each week now, for those who paid extra.

Expect to see soon: Sorrel, Kohlrabi, Mint, Arugula.

Cilantro - Love it or hate it, you now have a reason to use it. Researchers at Berkeley have identified a compound in cilantro that kills salmonella. The compound, dodecenal, was found to be twice as powerful in killing salmonella bacteria as the most commonly used antibiotic.

This suggests that salsa and other dishes made with raw cilantro have antibacterial properties. So, go ahead, make that fresh aioli (basically mayonaisse with garlic), add chopped cilantro, serve with fish. Perhaps the cilantro balances the risk of using raw egg yolk to make the aioli.

Gourmet Magazine also had some great cilantro ideas for this "pre-tomato season." Make a pineapple Sambal, an Indonesian relish containing finely chopped garlic (use green garlic), green onions, serrano chilies, cilantro, mixed into chunks of fresh pineapple with a dash of fish sauce and a pinch of salt and sugar. Let it marinate together and use fresh, or simmer ingredients together. Serve with grilled fish or meats.

Pea Vine

These little shoots were a very welcome sight to me this week. Linda and I went out in the afternoon and harvested a good amount of them for me to experiment with. To me this was a sign of new food on the horizon. These shoots are from a variety called Dwarf grey sugar peas and are planted close to the house along with the other peas. There are only two rows planted of this kind because they are harvested just for the shoots. The bunch in your box is cut close to the ground and then tied together, but you will want to cut off some of the bottom portion because it gets fibrous and cooking will not break it down. Try one and you will see what I mean. The top 6 inches or so is very edible and has the mild flavor and sweetness of a pea, with a fresh and vibrant flavor. I instantly thought of pureeing them into a soup, asparagus maybe? Or maybe a quick sauté alone or with another green, or just at the end of a stir fry or a salad of their own.

Turns out that is exactly what I did. I made a cream of asparagus soup for lunch with winter onions and pureed blanched pea vine in at the end. I thought it was great. Bright green with little bits of pea vine in every bite. I also made a kind of slaw with raw pea vine, thin sliced carrot and red cabbage with an Asian dressing. The staff who ate this rated it the best pea vine dish ever! If you make something like this I suggest you add the dressing right before you serve it because I think the pea vine will probably deteriorate quickly.



From front

Future effects? There will most likely be a gap in salad and spinach harvests in a few weeks.. We generally plant them weekly, but couldn't get in the field for 14 days. There was also a corn and bean planting that got delayed. We could see a gap in those crops in midsummer, too. The zucchini and summer squash plants that had to wait for those 14 days, as well, before being transplanted, were definitely stressed by the extra time in the greenhouse. We'll see if they grow normally now that they are in the field or if they produce less and for a shorter time. Some strawberry blossoms were frozen in the severe cold that brought in the first of the rains, but it looks like there are plenty more making berries, some as big as your thumb now, but still very green.

Overall, the farm, the crops and the crew are tired of the clouds, but we have weathered the storm in pretty good shape. No one has a crystal ball, so this farmer hesitates to grumble too much about this rain. Last year in June it just quit raining. In spite of our current soggy state, that could happen again. Then these rains would look like crop savers, rather than crop destroyers.

While the weather seems to get more and more erratic, (global warming at work!) what gets us through is years of experience. That experience informs us to manage our time well, sneaking in planting and other essential activities when only the smallest opportunity presents itself. We also have hired enough people and the *right* people, to help us get it all done! A motto to farm by: plan ahead to be ahead, and then weather the storm. -- Linda

CREAM OF ASPARAGUS SOUP WITH PEA VINE

SERVES ABOUT 6

Asparagus Spears	About 1#
Butter	3 T
Winter onion	1 Bunch
Flour	2T
Chicken Stock (if using water add more asparagus)	4 cup
Egg yolks	2
Heavy Cream (half and half)	2/3 cup
Salt and Pepper to taste	
Pea Vine	about half of your bunch (apprx 4 oz)

Wash asparagus and cut off tips. Reserve. Peel bottom portion if it seems tough or has a lot of the scales on it and chop into 1 to 2 inch pieces. Chop winter onion the same. Melt butter in saucepan and cook chopped asparagus and onion until tender and smelling good then add flour and stir. Add stock slowly at the beginning and stir into flour and onions. Add remaining stock and simmer gently until everything is tender. Cool slightly and carefully puree mixture in a blender in batches not filling it too high. Pass the puree through a medium strainer with a rubber spatula until almost dry. Clean pot and return puree. In a separate small pot heat enough boiling salty water to cook your asparagus tips just until barely tender. Remove and use same water to blanch pea vine just until it wilts. Beat egg yolks with cream then add mixture to the remaining puree. Stir well and simmer slowly until mixture thickens. Puree pea vine with just enough soup to make it puree into a bright green. Return to soup with asparagus tips and adjust with salt and pepper.

Cooking Terms

These are some cooking terms that I might use over the summer with definitions of what I mean so we are all on the same page.

Blanch: To cook partially, as in blanching asparagus means to drop in boiling water until bright green but removed before fully cooked. I might do this to save time, or to ensure that foods with different cooking times are ready together.

Emulsify: An emulsion is two liquids that do not normally mix that through our manipulation are forced to. The most common are oil and water-like liquids. Ex. vinaigrettes, mayonnaise, hollandaise, even milk and butter are emulsions. The action of doing this is emulsifying.

Shock: To cool rapidly, as in shocking asparagus in ice water after **blanching**. This is said to set the color of green vegetables and also stops the cooking process. Ex. hard boiled eggs.

Sweat: To cook gently without color. As in to sweat an onion, I would mean to cook an onion in butter or oil until the juices just start to come out of the onion. This is often done to help blend flavors and to have a good base of flavor that will be throughout the dish.

Sear: To cook over high heat in order to cause browning. Such as searing a piece of meat, or certain vegetables. The key to a good sear is to make sure you have enough oil in the pan, that the oil and the pan are very hot, and that the item you are searing is completely dry.

Again any questions or comments, send to porterhouse1@hotmail.com -- Derek Morrck, Summer Farm Cook

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