



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Customers ~ Since 1993  
Twin Cities Edition ~ Brown Week Delivery

## Thumper's Report from the Melon Patch

**by Richard de Wilde** Melons originated in the hot & dry conditions of Africa and India, but have spread worldwide and are available in a wide range of colors and sizes. From watermelon to cantaloupe to honeydew, they vary greatly in disease resistance and sweetness. Many Asian melons are used for pickling and cooking and are more like their cousins the cucumber in sweetness. We have searched the world over to find varieties that are dependable to grow, sweet, and small enough to fit in a CSA box. The watermelon is the most difficult. We have the small yellow seeded Japanese melon called Tiny Orchid, which is small, tasty and early, but very thin skinned and splits easily. Another Japanese melon, red with seeds, the Cathay Belle, develops slightly later and does not split.

Seedless melons are difficult to germinate and the seed is very expensive - about two seeds for \$1. Through years of experience, we have been successful in starting and raising tasty seedless melons. We start the seed in the greenhouse in soil pre-moistened and heated to 95 degrees. Once the seedlings are strong enough, we take them to the field and put the small plants into reflective plastic mulch on a raised bed. The reflection keeps the dreaded cucumber beetles away and a black stripe heats the soil where the melons are planted. We cover them with a wide row cover to trap more heat and protect from winds.

A small cantaloupe is another challenge, but we found a real winner with the French orange. With one parent being a French Charentais, it consistently ripens to a rich orange color with sweet flavor. The early Butterscotch and later Sister Serenade round out our small melon favorites. Unfortunately, the suppliers of these unique melons are threatening to discontinue them so we have embarked on a new seed saving venture. Sadly, our first attempt was

## THIS WEEK'S BOX

**PETITE GREEN BEANS:** These are a different variety of green bean than you first received. Beans have differing fiber contents, which do not necessarily affect flavor or tenderness, they just have different cooking times to bring them to their desired texture. Beans with higher fiber require longer cooking times than lower fiber green beans. This petite variety is a high fiber bean and is appropriate for fresh eating or will hold up well to canning or freezing.

**EDAMAME:** Edamame is a fresh eating soybean, a common snack food in Japan. To prepare them, boil for 3-5 minutes in boiling, salted water. Rinse under cold water and the beans will pop out of the pods easily. You can also roast them for a tasty snack. Toss the beans in their pods in oil and season with salt, pepper and any other spice you like (chili powder, Chinese Five-spice). Spread out on a cookie sheet and roast in a 400° F oven for 15 minutes. Cool slightly and then eat. You still can't eat the pod, but it does carry the flavor. Pull the pod through your teeth to pop out the beans and scrape off the flavor at the same time!

**PEPPERS (GREEN BELL AND ITALIA):** Roasted peppers have a smooth, deeper flavor than raw peppers. To char a pepper with a gas stove, arrange the peppers right over the burners with the flame turned on high. Turn them over every couple of minutes and cook until thoroughly charred and coated with black. If any section of the pepper becomes coated with white ash, you are overdoing it, move that part of the pepper out of the flame. To peel and seed your peppers, put the charred peppers in a plastic bag or a bowl covered with plastic wrap for 10 minutes. Then pull off the charred peels with your fingers. Scrape off any stubborn patches with a paring knife. Cut out the stems with a paring knife and cut the peppers in half lengthwise. Spoon out the seeds and pull out any large pieces of white pulp. Your peppers are now ready to toss into a quesadilla, casserole, black bean salad or top off a pizza.

**GARLIC:** The easiest way to peel garlic is to break the cloves off the garlic head and crush them, one at a time, by laying the side of a chef's knife over each clove and giving the knife a quick whack with your fist. The peel will just slip off.

**EGGPLANT (BLACK & ORIENTAL LILAC BRIDE OR DANCER):** Store your eggplant in a cool place (not in the refrigerator) and cook the eggplant within two days. Eggplant can be grilled, sautéed, and baked.

**LEeks:** Leeks, to me, are like the royal members of the onion family. They have a subtle earthy flavor that's hard to get enough of and are especially delicious when cooked with cream in soups, or when served cold in a mustardy vinaigrette. Leeks need to be carefully washed because sand and mud have a nasty way of hiding in between the leaves and membranes of the white. To wash leeks, cut off the greens leaving a couple of inches of pale green attached to the white. To rid leeks of grit, cut the leeks in half lengthwise or, if the leeks must be left whole, only down to an inch above the root end. Hold the leeks under cold running water with the green end facing down and fold back the membranes, one by one, rubbing between thumb and forefinger to rinse out grit. Trim off the hairy root end exactly where it joins the base of the leek. Don't cut above the bottom or the leek will fall apart.

**SALAD MIX:** It's back! This has been a challenging year to grow lettuces for salad mix. Between cool weather early in the season followed by excess rain and then dry soil that prevented germination, we are glad to finally have a crop to harvest. In your mix this week the lettuces will include a red oakleaf and Freckles (the green, flat leaf with red splashes). The greens in your mix include red Russian kale, red mustard and mizuna. Enjoy!

**WATERMELON & MINI MELON:** It's summer and we finally have watermelons! Eat it just as it is, or check out [www.epicurious.com](http://www.epicurious.com) for a tasty watermelon, tomato and mint salad with feta cheese.

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a tasty failure. While we expected an orange melon, the green genes expressed themselves and we didn't get what we expected. We'll keep trying.

Of course, growing super sweet melons creates some problems. From tiny mice to herds of deer, sometimes crows and turkeys, but raccoons are the worst for making a feast of our melons! A hot electric fence will help, but it is hard to manage to keep vines or grass off the low wires and still allow the wagon in to pick at least three days per week.

How do you tell when a melon is ready to pick? Look for the ones with a hole where the raccoons scooped out the center! No, most of the cantaloupe and honeydew types "slip", meaning that when they are ripe the stem slips off the melon with a gentle sideways push. Others, like Serenade, are more difficult because they never slip. Other indicators for Serenade include yellowing leaves, subtle color changes or small cracks appearing on the rind. Many melons have to be closely examined, picked and tasted until the clues to ripeness are learned. Each variety is different, so melon picking requires much learning and has become a prized skill here on the farm.

Watermelons are the most difficult to pick and this year has been the most challenging I have ever seen in my 30+ years farming. Here is how it's supposed to work: We look at the curly tendril where the watermelon stem is attached to the vine. If it is dried to brown, we go both directions along the vine to look at the next tendrils. If all three tendrils are brown, turn the melon over and look at the bottom. The color will change from yellow to golden or orange when ripe. If the melon was moved in weeding or not put back down after looking at it, or is held off the ground by a vine, it will not turn color. Then what to do? That is when you thump it. Listen for a deep bass note sound. Too high a pitch, more like a "ping," indicates unripe, but you also have to take into account that small melons always have a higher pitched sound than large melons, even when ripe. A dull "thud" may mean overripe, turning to wine or maybe having just a little hollow heart. Decisions, decisions, with every melon picked. Sometime we miss. Please be understanding, it is very tricky. I have to go rest my brain, ears, and thumping finger now. Tomorrow we pick melons again!

### BRAISED CHICKEN BREASTS ON CREAMY LEEKS

Serves 4

2 lb medium leeks (white and pale green parts only)	2 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 boneless skinless chicken breast halves (1 1/2 lb total)	1/3 cup dry white wine
	1/3 cup chicken broth
1/2 tablespoon vegetable oil	1/3 cup heavy cream

-Halve leeks lengthwise, then cut crosswise into 1-inch pieces.

-Pat chicken dry and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil and 1/2 tablespoon butter in a 10-inch nonstick skillet over moderately high heat until foam subsides, then brown chicken on both sides, about 4 minutes total. Transfer to a plate.

-Add wine to skillet and deglaze by boiling over high heat, stirring and scraping up brown bits, until reduced to about 2 tablespoons, 1 to 2 minutes. Add leeks and remaining 2 tablespoons butter and salt and pepper to taste, then simmer over moderately low heat, covered, stirring occasionally, until leeks are wilted, about 10 minutes. Stir in broth. Top leeks with chicken breasts and juices from plate, then gently simmer over low heat, covered, until leeks are tender and chicken is just cooked through, about 8 minutes.

-Transfer chicken breasts to a plate. Add cream to skillet and simmer over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until thickened slightly, 1 to 2 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste.

-Serve chicken on top of leeks.

from [www.epicurious.com](http://www.epicurious.com)

## Produce Plus

3# Italian Basil: \$24, 3# Italian Garlic: \$20,

10# Petite Green Beans: \$30

Place your order via phone (608/483-2143x2) or email ([csa@harmonyvalleyfarm.com](mailto:csa@harmonyvalleyfarm.com)) by Monday, August 25. Please send a check for payment directly to the farm the day you place your order. Your produce will be delivered to your site on August 28, in a box with your name on it.

### THIS WEEK'S BOX, CONTINUED

**SAUTE MIX OR ARUGULA:** Both of these greens are in the spicier class of greens and add interest and depth of flavor to any meal. The sauté mix greens are harvested a little more mature so they hold up well to cooking. Add them into casseroles, soups, or wilt them down and incorporate into fillings for dishes such as stuffed peppers, lasagna or eggrolls. This time of the season, arugula can be pretty spicy. The spiciness of this green is balanced out well with salty foods (sausage, nuts, pickled vegetables, cheese) and sweet foods including pears, sweet balsamic vinaigrette, or candied nuts.

**YUKINA SAVOY:** This is not only a tasty little green, but also rich in nutrients and versatile. This week, try simmering Yukina in cream with leeks until both are tender. Top with your favorite cheese and put in the oven until golden and bubbly.

**ZUCCHINI OR SUMMER SQUASH:** For a simple summer supper, sauté ground beef with onions, garlic and peppers. Season with salt, pepper, oregano and thyme. Add diced squash, cover with tomato sauce and simmer for about 10-15 minutes or until squash is tender. Top with the shredded cheese of your choosing and cover until melted.

**CUCUMBERS:** Toss in some rice wine vinegar, honey, fresh ginger, sliced leeks, and marinate 2-4 hours. Season with salt & pepper. Goes great with grilled fish!

**MYSTERY ITEM:** This week, you'll be the lucky recipient of one of the following items: **Raspberries, tomatoes, or okra!** If you get the okra, you can use the entire plant except the stem. Even the seeds are edible! When you slice into the pod, you'll notice a thick substance. This is normal and actually is one of the unique characteristics of okra. This substance is actually a thickener and is often used in gumbos and other Cajun dishes. You can grill okra whole, cut it and fry, or simply sauté it. Enjoy!

Our next on farm event is our Harvest Party on  
Sunday, September 28. Save the date!