



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

October 25-26, 2013

## Cover Crops and the Cool Things They Do

by Richard and Andrea

It's hard to believe we are already at the end of October, but the days are getting shorter and we're adding more layers to ward off the chilly nights and mornings. We are continuing to harvest root crops as well as greens, which are now under covers to protect them from frosty mornings. We are almost done planting next year's garlic crop and we've started saving sunchokes to replant for next year's crop. As we finish up the season, it's time to put the final touches on our fields and put them to bed for the winter. This means removing mulch and irrigation lines, taking down tomato stakes and chopping any remaining plant material (such as broccoli stalks). We've been planting cover crops since August, so many fields are already covered with a lush blanket of green growth. Planting cover crops in the fall is a very important part of our production system, and a part of the natural world that we find very intriguing.

So let's take a closer look at exactly what it means to "put the fields to bed" for the season. Starting as early as August, our standard operating procedure when we finish harvesting a crop is to immediately follow with the chopper to break down any remaining plant material, then do a light disking, and finally cover crop seeds are planted. This happens fast and the whole process can be completed in 24-36 hours! This is very time-sensitive and every day matters because you really want to maximize the growth of the cover crop while the fall days are still warm. Of course we need moisture in the soil to germinate the seeds, so sometimes we dance with the weather and try to time the seeding right before or after a rain.

Every year we are intrigued by cover crops and find ourselves wondering why more farmers don't utilize them. Cover crops are crops that are planted to cover a field and offer many benefits. They are an excellent example of how it pays off to work in alignment with nature. While we plant most of our cover crops in the fall, they could be planted at other times of the year in certain scenarios. Cover crops are often grains or legumes, but some farmers

## This Week's Box

**YELLOW ONIONS:** Soups, stews, slow-braised meats....Onions form the flavor base of so many warm, winter dishes.

**CARROTS:** Stir-fry with strips of jicama and peppers. Season with a splash of soy sauce and a drizzle of toasted sesame seeds.

**RUSSET POTATOES:** These are an excellent potato for mashed potatoes or baked potatoes. Make salt-roasted whole baked potatoes by rubbing the outside of the potato with oil and a generous amount of coarse salt. Roast at 350°F until tender. Enjoy with butter & sour cream.

**LACINATO KALE:** An excellent kale for raw kale salads! Slice the leaves into very thin strips. Add thinly sliced onion, sweet peppers, minced garlic and season with salt and pepper. Add a drizzle of flavorful oil (enough to lightly coat all the leaves) and a few splashes of red-wine vinegar. Toss thoroughly and let the salad rest in the refrigerator for several hours....add a little cheese if you'd like before serving.

**POBLANO PEPPERS:** This is the last of our peppers for the season! You'll recognize these as the only peppers in your box this week, but do note that they may be red or green. This is a medium heat pepper. Slice thinly and saute with onion and garlic. Add cooked squash and season with ground cumin, coriander, salt and pepper. Top with shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese.

**SALAD MIX:** It won't be long before these crops are finished for the season, so enjoy a few more fresh salads while it's here. Both spinach and salad mix make a great base for fall salads garnished with pears, apples, blue cheese, toasted or candied nuts.

**HONEYNUT BUTTERNUT SQUASH:** This is a special variety of butternut squash---meant to be a small, personal sized squash. Simply slice in half and bake, cut side down, until tender. They are so sweet and flavorful you hardly have to do anything else to them....unless you want to season with salt and pepper and a drizzle of hazelnut oil or a pat of butter.

**SPAGHETTI OR DELICATA OR KABOCHA SQUASH OR PIE PUMPKINS:** Squash is very versatile and can be lightly sautéed with a variety of other veggies.

**SWEET POTATOES:** They are finally ready! Captain Jack says it's time for baked sweet potato fries! Store your sweet potatoes in a cool, dry location away from direct sunlight.

**GARLIC:** Blend fresh garlic cloves into mayonnaise along with a few tablespoons of buttermilk, dried thyme and black pepper to make a creamy home-style "Buttermilk Ranch" dressing.

**FRISEE:** See vegetable feature

**BEETS:** Cooked beets are great to have on hand for a fall salad along with blue cheese, apples and walnuts.

**MINI SWEET PEPPERS:** This is the last little taste of the season.... Enjoy!

**CHOICE:** Jicama

also plant crops such as turnips or radishes as a cover crop. Cover crops serve several different purposes. First, the crop will out-compete any fall weeds that might germinate in a field...and we hate weeds! There are actually some weeds that germinate and start their growth cycle in the fall. Once they are established, we have to deal with them in the spring when they start to bloom. The more weeds we can prevent from getting established in the fall, the better it will be in the spring. Cover crops also help hold soil in place. Winter winds and moisture can carry precious topsoil away if there isn't something to hold it

in place. We try to get cover crops established as soon as possible so we can maximize their growth potential and form a strong root structure to hold the soil in place and prevent erosion.

We often plant a combination of a cereal grain and a legume. One such combination is oats and chickling vetch, and the other common combo is rye and hairy vetch. Both chickling vetch and hairy vetch are legumes that can take nitrogen from the air and fix it in the soil. They form little nitrogen nodules on their roots. If you dig up a plant you can actually see the nitrogen nodules. How cool is this?! It's nature's

way of putting fertilizer on a field, which is super-important in an organic production system where we don't use synthetic nitrogen fertilizers.

This leads us to another important reason why we plant cover crops...to build soil health and nutrition and hold onto nutrients. Cover crop plants act like a sponge for nutrients that are available in the soil. Many nutrients in the soil are water-soluble and can be lost when they wash away with melting snow and moisture over the winter and in the spring. If you have a plant in the soil, it will take up the nutrients and utilize or hold onto them. Some cover crops, such as our oats and chickling vetch combo, will winter-kill, meaning they can't survive frosts and freezing temperatures so they die in the fall. Early in the fall we plant the oats and chickling vetch combo because the chickling vetch can fix nitrogen pretty quickly and we can get a nice, lush, nitrogen rich stand of cover crop before the first frost. When oats and chickling vetch winter kill, the plant matter will breakdown and becomes a "green manure" crop that adds nutrients and nitrogen to the soil. Our other combo, rye and hairy vetch will be established in the fall but will start growing again in the spring. While rye and hairy vetch take up some nutrients in the fall, they are most beneficial in the spring when they sponge up and hold onto nutrients that will be beneficial for the later fall crops that we'll plant on that land in early summer. It all boils down to capturing as much solar energy as possible and using it for photosynthesis and nutrient uptake.

Using cover crops is a very efficient way to protect and add nutrients to the soil. Once the crop is planted, everything happens in place—no additional need to haul or spread additional fertilizer...the plant does all the work for us! Management is key to making this all come together. This year Angel, Manuel and Tim have worked together to get our cover crops seeded. They have done an excellent job and we have beautiful, lush green covers on our fields that were able to capture the warm, sunny fall days and fix nutrients in place for next year. It really makes us optimistic about next year's crops and we'll sleep better this winter knowing our fields are tucked away.

## Vegetable Feature: Frisee

by Chef Beth

The name speaks for itself. Frisee is a frizzy textured green that is a part of the chicory family. It is characterized by its green to white leaves and bitter sweet flavor. Frisee is also an endive green that is milder in flavor to its relative endive family members, radicchio and Belgian endive. Most endive greens are cylinder shaped but frisee has a shaggy and bushy shape. Frisee became more popular in the 1990's as chefs became fascinated by the green. It was used in gourmet dishes for the texture contrast to other greens, and its way of adding extra volume to a plate. As its popularity grew, consumers could find it more in high-end grocery stores, co-ops, and farmers' markets. Store these greens in an air tight container in the refrigerator, if they are properly kept the greens will last up to five days.

Frisee is best when grown in the fall, especially when it starts to get colder. The flavor becomes more mellow. While it still is characterized by a bit of bitterness, it's balanced more by sweetness. The inner center core becomes more blanched and is typically more mild flavored & sweet. The outer, darker green leaves are very edible, but may be more strongly flavored, thus a mixture of the two is often a nice combo.

Although frisee is a bitter green, it can be used in various ways. These greens are great wilted in miso soup, sautéed and added into an egg frittata or sautéed with butter and garlic and put in a pasta and shrimp dish. These greens do very well with flavor packed ingredients such as vinegar, oils, cheese, and cured, smoked or roasted meats. Toss them in a warm vinaigrette, duck or chicken drippings, pancetta, lemon bacon, or serve topped with a poached or fried egg. Use the unique frisee green in your next dish to pump up the flavor and volume.

### Grilled Ham and Smoked Provolone Sandwich

by Chef Beth

Serves 2

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion, sliced thin
- 3 Tbsp butter, divided
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 slices smoked provolone cheese
- 4 thick pieces of whole grain bread
- 6 oz smoked carved ham, (3 oz per sandwich)
- 1 Tbsp dijon mustard
- 4 sprigs of frisee

1. Heat oil in a small sauté pan over medium heat and follow by adding the sliced onion. Sauté for about 5 minutes and add 1 Tbsp of butter to the pan. Turn the heat down to low and cover the sauté pan. Cook the onions, stirring occasionally, until tender and golden brown. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and set the pan aside.
2. Butter the slices of bread on each side with the remaining butter. Divide the cheese, ham, onion, Dijon, and frisee equally amongst the two pieces of bread. Finish by topping the ingredients with the remaining pieces of bread.
3. Heat a medium sauté pan over medium- low heat. Add the sandwiches and cook until the bread is golden brown on each side and the cheese is melted. Serve immediately.

### Grilled Crostini with Pancetta and Frisee Appetizer

By Chef Beth

Serves 4

- 2 cloves of garlic, 1 whole and 1 minced
- 4 thick pieces of toasted warm baguette
- ¼ red onion, sliced thin
- 5 Tbsp balsamic vinegar, divided
- 4 slices raw pancetta
- 1 Tbsp chopped tarragon
- ¼ cup mascarpone cheese
- 4 sprigs frisee
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Use one clove of garlic and rub over warm toasted baguette slices.
2. In a bowl, toss the red onion with 1 Tbsp of balsamic vinegar and set aside. Let stand for 10 minutes and finish by draining the onion and discarding the vinegar.
3. In a small sauce pan, boil the remaining balsamic vinegar until reduced to 1 Tbsp.
4. In another sauté pan over medium heat, add the pancetta and cook until just about crisp. Drain the fat and add the minced garlic and tarragon and cook for one minute.
5. Spread an equal portion of mascarpone cheese on each baguette. Follow by topping the cheese with the crisp pancetta, garlic and tarragon. Garnish with a sprig of frisee each and the vinegar soaked onions. Drizzle with the reduced balsamic vinegar, add salt and pepper to taste, and serve warm.