

What's Happening on the Farm?

Greetings Friends!

Heat waves have fascinating effects on vegetables. We've been learning lots more about them in the last couple years, as we've all endured a couple doozies lately, a month earlier than the dog days of August.

Last year's heat wave was longer than what we've had so far, and it's important to note that it was also more humid. Although predictions made in July are almost futile since there are so many variables still to come, the drier air this year is giving us much more optimism for the summer and fall harvests than we had at this time last July. You might remember one of the key effects of excessive heat and humidity in July is that it can prevent pollination in several fruiting crops — tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, beans — and can even prevent the production of flowers in squash, cucumbers, and beans as well. There was lots of talk, around the state and in the news, about how tomatoes in home gardens and on farms had a fraction of a typical amount of fruit hanging on the vines. On this farm last year, all the crops mentioned above yielded less than usual, mostly due to the problems from the heat and humidity. So this year we've been watching like hawks to see if these flowers are forming and then going on to form baby fruits, and the good news is that it looks better than last year!!! There have definitely been some flowers falling off without making fruit, but much, much fewer than last year. The exceptions were noticeable in this week's slightly smaller share: in the beans, which late last week we had to close because the heat had caused a "gap" in their flower and fruit production. It's hard for us to say when they'll get going again. And the cucumbers, zucchini and summer squash slowed down a lot, which was one of the reasons the share was a little smaller. Of the "pointy-butt" fruits, probably from incomplete pollination.

Now that it's hot again, and humid, we'll see how the current rounds of flowers and fruit do, but it is nice to see that there are a good amount of those yummy summer fruits hanging on the plants out there. One of the strategies we've focused on in recent years, to help with this "new normal" of extreme weather, is to plant several staggered plantings of crops that are susceptible to heat and humidity. This helps ensure that one planting or another will probably be flowering and setting fruit when it's *not* 100 degrees and 95% humidity. We've always had staggered plantings of beans, summer squash and cucumbers and several others, but we've now also staggered more plantings of tomatoes and peppers. One that we haven't staggered is the winter squash, and we'll be watching those fields closely now, since they are entering their major flower production stage. Hopefully we'll see lots of those big yellow blossoms to keep us all satiated in the fall!!

Other crops that we're adjusting to deal with the intense heat include : broccoli, of which we'll do earlier plantings of our hot summer variety; and for peas, we're planning to arrange the fields in the spring so we can get them planted earlier in April to try to beat an early heat wave such as this one, and have a longer pea season.

The recent dryness did get a little interruption with a 1/2 inch of rain on Friday. But the intense swing from one week of super-wet to three weeks of super-dry, alongside the areas of the state and country who have been dry the whole time and didn't get the deluge we received, are yet more hard-to-miss reminders that our climate is changing. And we need to work hard and fast to evolve our agricultural practices to be resilient to the new challenges, and the unforeseen ones as well. How do we do this with a combination of new and old ideas and practices that don't harm human and environmental health in the process? That's up to all of us.

Thanks for supporting this farm as we try to meet these challenges!



July 16, 2012

CROP Forecast

The effects of the first heat wave were noticeable in this past week's share, in lower yields of beans, and cucumbers, zucchini and summer squash, and also in the broccoli. They all seem to be starting to get rolling again, but it is hard to say how much they'll produce this week. The greens, however, will continue to be a little low—and that's due to the rain a month ago. At the time, the newly sprouted plantings of greens and lettuce were in that low spot down by the road, where some topsoil from elsewhere on the farm settled and buried some of them. We'll have some, but just not as much.

Eggplant is in! We lost most of our eggplants last year to hot and dry weather combined with intense bug pressure, so being able to harvest it now is extra-sweet for us. This variety is an Asian type, and doesn't need to be peeled since the skin is more tender than other eggplants. They are very sweet and tender, and we recommend chopping and stir-frying them, or slicing and grilling, or in ratatouille or similar dishes. We'll have a few bigger Italian-style eggplants this week, and it looks like many more in a couple weeks.



We maybe, maybe, will be able to find enough red **tomatoes** for everyone to have one this week, though many of them will be on the smaller side. Many more to come! Peppers will probably be starting in about 3 weeks.

Fennel we'd like to learn how to grow bigger bulbs, but we have a few small ones for roasting with beets, pork, or fish. The tops can be used in salad, and the bulb is also good paired with oranges. **Cucumbers, broccoli, summer squash and zucchini** are on the upswing, though with this new heat they might decline again. The **sweet onions** are ready and they're delicious, and the scallions will fade away. Our **cabbage** is struggling with fungal disease again, so the heads are mostly small and we might not have much for a month or two. **Napa cabbage** is hanging in though. **Carrots, beets, Swiss chard and kale** all look good.

And starting this week everyone gets a head of **Garlic**! We harvested last week, it's beautiful and yummy, remember its flavor is a little stronger than most of the garlic found in stores, so one clove goes a long way! Your share includes a head a week from now until September; if at any point you want more we do have extras for sale for \$1/head.

Thanks for eating with us,
and may your kitchens and tables be bountiful and joyful!

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What's Cooking?

(more recipes can be found on our website—openhandsfarm.com.)



Baked Kale Chips

A kid favorite from our friends at Loon Organics.

Serves 4.

- 1 bunch or 1/2 clear bag kale (dinosaur or lacinato with the flat leaves works best, but you can use any kind)
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 c. grated Parmesan cheese, optional

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

Wash kale leaves and dry them well. Remove the tough stems from the leaves. Cut or tear the kale leaves into large pieces, toss with olive oil in a bowl. Arrange leaves in a single layer on a large baking sheet and sprinkle with salt. Bake for 20 minutes, or until crisp.

Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on the top of the chips 5 minutes before you take them out of the oven. Be careful not to overbake as the chips may get bitter. Place baking sheet on a rack to cool. Crunch away!

Tangerine and Fennel Salad

with Mixed Greens

From *Asparagus to Zucchini* Cookbook

- 6-7 small tangerines
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup dry sherry or flat champagne
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced fennel bulb
- 2 Tbsp minced fennel "leaves"
- salt and pepper to taste
- 4-5 cups mixed salad greens

Cut 1 of the tangerines in half and squeeze the juice into a medium bowl. Mix in olive oil, sherry, both kinds of fennel, salt, and pepper. Peel remaining tangerines; divide into segments. Pierce each segment with a sharp fork a couple of times (to absorb dressing). Add tangerines to dressing; toss well. Chill thoroughly. Divide greens onto 4 salad plates. Arrange tangerine mixture over greens, drizzling some directly onto greens. Sprinkle with additional salt and pepper.

Makes 4 servings.

WHAT'S FOR U-PICK?

Beans will hopefully be recovering from the heat soon. Remember the yellows and purple down at the south end, and try the purple spotted at the north end. It's hard to say, but they also might be a little low-yielding next week due to the current heat wave.

Peas are beyond done, we're sure you noticed if you were brave enough to go searching for any last week. Next year we're planning to plant earlier in hopes that they come earlier and we can pick them for a longer season. It doesn't always work that way, but it seems the early hot weather keeps making for short harvests, so we'll give it a shot.

Flowers, Cilantro and Basil are doing well. We love that you're keeping the flowers picked, and hope that means everyone is getting their fill. Just in case you're not, we'll be sure to plant more next year; more flowers on the farm also means more beauty and more good bugs, so there's lots of reasons to plant more flowers. There are more varieties of flowers and herbs to come over the summer too.

There might be a trickling of cherry tomatoes by next week, we'll see.

Always feel free to ask us any questions you have about U-picking or anything else. We might look busy working or playing, but we're here to serve you!

Bulk Produce for You

This week's selection is: Garlic for \$1/head, Eggplant for \$1.50/lb, Zucchini for \$1/lb, Curly Kale for \$3/lb, Swiss Chard for \$3/lb.

To make an order, simply call or email us at least 2 days ahead of the day you'd like to pick it up.

Thank you!

