Capturing the Swarm

I tried to take some time away from the field on Tuesday morning in order to catch up on my admin work. I left at about 9:45 AM, as Jake and the rest of the crew were finishing up the morning harvest. I had barely opened my computer and started to sift through my inbox when I got a call from the field. Jake said that the interns had abandoned the romas because a great cloud of bees had come out of one of the hives and surrounded them. He was calling from the wash shed, and said that he could see the cloud swirling around a tree about 500 feet away at the end of the field, not far from the hives. A swarm!

In the few minutes it took me to get back to the farm, the bees had settled in a large cluster on one of the upper branches of the tree. Though I have seen plenty of photos of swarms, I have never seen a live one before. It was truly amazing. Thousands of bees drooping from a branch is quite a sight.

I checked with the interns to find out which hive it came out of. It sounds like it was Fern. Her bee population was huge this summer and a few weeks ago we found swarm cells in her brood chamber. She was growing a new queen in preparation for moving out. In order to prevent the exodus, Sarah and I created an artificial swarm. We found the queen and relocated her along with about one third of her bees into a new hive. With the original queen and many bees gone, Fern should have settled down into her new roomier home (the swarm impulse is often spurred by overcrowding in the hive.) Instead, she decided to cast a second swarm. Though a swarm can emerge at any time of the day, for some reason they most commonly emerge at 10:00 AM sharp. And that is just what this swarm did. Amazing.

Jake and I assured the interns it was safe to reenter the romas, and then we tried to figure out if we could capture the swarm and rehive it. The bees were about 25 feet from the ground, so we did not have high hopes for success, but we decided to try it. First we put on bee veils. Then Jake climbed the tree and I climbed the box truck positioned under the tree. We cut away some branches to make a clear path beneath the swarm. Then I positioned a cardboard box on top of the truck and as directly under the bees as I could manage. It was hard to tell if the box was lined up, because the swarm was still about 10 to 15 feet above me. The plan was that Jake would shake the branch, just one sharp shake, and the bees would fall in a clump into the box. We recognized it was not the best plan. But neither of us could even come close to actually reaching the cluster to cut it down. So, it was the best plan we had.

Jake shook. The bees fell. Then there was a thud as they hit the truck (not the box). I should have known that the clump would not stay completely together, but I did not expect to suddenly be under a rain of bees, I was. It was a little scary even though I knew swarming bees are the gentlest bees you can encounter. (Since they are in the process of moving to a new home, they have nothing to protect and thus are not aggressive.) When I regained my wits, I swept the bees into the box and closed them up. The bees I missed went right back up to the branch, so we repeated the process 3 times to get as many bees as possible. Neither Jake nor I were stung or otherwise hurt through this non-OSHA-approved process.

The bees are now in a hive in my backyard. If we got the queen she will be laying eggs in a few days and we will have one more hive! If we missed the queen, the bees will go into a weak hive and help that hive prepare for winter.

In the Share

- Red Cabbage, 1 head
- Carrots, 1 bag
- Edamame, 1 bag
- Summer Squash, 2 pieces
- Scallions, 1 bunch
- Red Peppers, 3 pieces
- Roma Tomatoes, 1 bag
- Choice of Herb, 1 bunch
- Garlic, 1 bulb
- Red Tomatoes, see signs on crates
- Heirloom Tomatoes, see signs

The big news this week is the edamame. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this crop, it is really just a fresh green soybean. I was first introduced to it many years ago at a party. Though I was initially skeptical about those fuzzy green pods, after I tried them, I could not stop snacking on them. I hear that edamame is a common snack in Japan, much like pretzels or popcorn here.

For me the best way to eat edamame is still the simplest way. First, bring a pot of salted water to boil. Add the edamame and cook for 5 to 6 minutes. Test the edamame for doneness at that point. The beans inside the pod should be firm, but should also give to the teeth. If the beans get mushy, they are overcooked. Once they have reached your desired texture, pour them out into a colander to drain away the water. Then serve them in a bowl with a little course salt sprinkled on top. I like them hot, but some folks prefer to wait for them to come to room temperature. To eat, either pop the beans out of the pods with your fingers, or pull the pods through your teeth to extract the beans (continued on the back)
directly into your mouth. I like the second method best because then you also get a little salt on your tongue from the pod. You have 14 oz. of these precious beans in your share today. That should be enough to have a snack and to make the salad recipe below.

We are officially no longer worried about late blight on the tomatoes. Because of all the rain this summer, the plants are being devastated by a number of other diseases that thrive in the wet. Some of the plants in the community gardens have nothing left to them put one little green leaf at the top and a few ripening tomatoes. Our plants still look a little better than that, but soon enough they will give up for the season. I remember the days when we would worry about frost taking down the plants before the harvest was done. But for the past three years at least, the plants have been dead and gone long before frost. It will be an early end to the tomato season again this year as well. I have to say, I’m so grateful that we had a tomato season at all that I’m not overly concerned about the plants early, but typical, decline.

Though we still feel anxious about the state of the field these days, once we saw this share put together, we were really quite proud. There are still plenty of tomatoes (though you will see a decline in the quality of the slicers); the red cabbage is beautiful; the edamame is the best we have had in years; the peppers are incredible and delicious; the scallions are huge; and even the squash came back for a small showing! Enjoy!

Next week: Leeks, delicata squash, salsa, tomatoes, and the last of the edamame.

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**Recipe**

**Edamame Carrot Salad**

This recipe comes from our second-year farm intern Laurel Blomquist. You may remember her culinary columns on tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables from last summer. She says this salad comes from a recipe she uses at Whole Foods.

8 oz. blanched and shelled edamame
2 oz. shredded carrot
1/2 stalk sliced scallion
a few sprigs chopped cilantro

Combine vegetables with dressing.
Refrigerate for 30 minutes to marry the flavors.

Dressing (this is enough for at least 2 recipes):
1/4 cup rice vinegar, white wine vinegar, lemon juice, or a combination
1 clove minced garlic
1 tsp salt
1/2 tsp pepper

Whisk dressing ingredients together, then slowly drizzle in:
1/2 cup olive oil, canola oil, your favorite vegetable oil, or a combination