In the Share

Butternut Squash, 1 piece
Carrots, 1 bag
Red Potatoes, 1 bag
Black Turtle Beans, 1 bag
Leeks, 1 bunch
Red Bell Pepper, 1 piece
Carmen Red Peppers, 1 piece
Mustard Greens, 1 bunch
Garlic, 1 head
Choice of Herb, 1 bunch
Tomatoes, see signs

Claire’s Comments

The Farmer’s Garden

After my first few years working on farms, I developed this romantic notion of gardening. I thought it would be so wonderful to work a small plot where I would have so much more time for each individual plant. There would be no weeds. All the vegetables would be huge and lush. It would be perfect, or so the imagined romance ran.

When I took a break from farming in 1999 and got a regular full time job, I signed up for a community garden plot near my apartment in Madison. I was so excited. I spent my spring designing practical yet artful beds and planning for all the food I would grow. When I actually started digging those beds, it did not take long for me to find that the soil was of poor quality and also riddled with quack grass roots. Though I spend a great deal of time weeding and coaxing, I never was able to harvest much of anything from the garden. It was then I decided that while I might be able to be a good farmer one day, I certainly was not a gardener. The romance was ended.

Several years later, my partner Sarah left the eastside of Madison and moved all the way over here to the north so that we could live together. She gave up her own community garden plot after the move and also worried that she would never have the neighborly sidewalk chats that she regularly had on the more walkable eastside. I wondered if we could address both of these losses by having a garden at home. Maybe. But I was worried when I remembered how badly my first gardening attempt had gone.

At first we started slowing by planting 12 fruit trees in the back yard. They were lovely little sticks that first year. The following year we stripped out 3 beds of sod and planted 40 asparagus. Sarah was fine with starting slop out asparagus stalks, filled our bellies with as many strawberries as we could eat and still had enough to freeze 15 quarts for winter, and we even got 10 peaches from our very small fruit tree planting. It seemed that maybe if we worked together we might be able to pull off a home garden after all!

With that small success, it was time to start thinking big. I felt ready to expand our little homestead into the front yard. It would be perfect. I imagined neighbors stopping by to talk while we weeded. We could set up a table in the garden for eating lovely dinners, invite friends over to grill pizzas in the drive. It was a perfectly romantic idea, again. Sarah was appropriately worried about taking on so much and I was not looking forward to stripping and hauling all that sod, so we only got as far as the table and the pizzas that year.

Then this spring, as I was taking the tractor out of my garage and getting it ready to move to the farm, I realized that maybe I kill the front lawn without having to strip and remove all the sod. I would just till it and plant cover crops as though I were starting a new farm field! It worked perfectly. After a round of oats and then a round of buckwheat all the grass was dead, the soil was light
Rainbow Chard (or Other Greens) Gnocchi from Lindsay Schmidt

4 potatoes medium sized, peeled
1 bunch (about 3 packed cups) rainbow chard (or other greens), de-stemmed
2 to 4 tablespoons milk
2 cups flour
1 cup Parmesan, grated
salt
2 to 4 tablespoons butter

1. Cut the potatoes into quarters and boil in salted water until tender.
2. In another medium pot, boil salted water and submerge the chard for about 20 seconds. The color will become bright. Remove the greens to a bowl of ice water to cool quickly. When the greens are cool, place them in a colander to drain.
3. Process the cooked potatoes and the drained greens in a cuisinart. (If you don’t have a mixer, you can run the potatoes through a ricer or mash them well with a fork and mince the chard finely with a knife.) Add a bit of milk to help blend the potatoes and chard together well.
4. In a large mixing bowl, combine the potato/chard mixture with the Parmesan, flour, and salt to taste. If they mixture seems very wet, add a little bit more flour. Try not to work this mixture very much in order to keep the gnocchi light.
5. Take about a cup of dough and roll it back and forth on a floured surface to make a long cylinder about 1 inch around. Use a knife to cut the cylinder into bite sized pillows. Add a little design with a floured fork, or not. Lay out the cut gnocchi on a flour surface.
6. Cook the gnocchi in boiling water in small batches. When the pillows float to the top, remove them to a lightly oiled sheet tray so they do not stick.
7. If you like, you can then also fry the gnocchi. Heat butter in a cast iron skillet and brown the gnocchi on both sides.
8. Gently toss the gnocchi with sauce or any desired toppings and serve immediately.

Recipe

Farm intern Lindsay Schmidt submitted this recipe. While the original (printed below) calls for chard, Lindsay suggests trying it with other greens like kale or collards or the mustard greens included in today’s share. The gnocchi will go well with a simple red sauce made from garlic, red peppers, and some of the tomatoes from today’s share.

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(continued from “Claire’s Comments”) and fluffy, and I was ready to dig the beds. The farmer had learned some things that greatly benefited the gardener!

Of course, taking the time to plant and work in those rounds of cover crops meant that I would not really be able to grow much in the garden this year. It was a foundation year and well worth the extra time and care it took.

Now the front yard garden is planted to 5 beds of strawberries that should produce in the spring, a full bed of spinach that will overwinter in the cold frames that Sarah built, and some fall broccoli and cabbage that may or may not produce heads yet this year. The remaining beds grew buckwheat during the summer and provided nectar for our backyard bees. When the buckwheat was done, I pulled it out and laid it on the beds as winter mulch. Next year those beds will be planted to dry beans, edamame, kale, salad greens, and some other things we never seem to tire of.

All summer as we dug and planted and ate dinner at our little table, friends and neighbors stopped by to talk—just as we had hoped. Sarah even went a step further and converted an old bee box into a little free library that we posted at the edge of the garden. We filled it with good books and already folks are taking books and leaving books behind.

Though there is still much to do before the front yard garden is fully installed, the romance if fully renewed. We harvested peaches, apricots, plums, and apples from our little orchard; the asparagus is producing well; and now we have plenty of room for all the annuals we could ever want.

It turns out I love gardening just as much as I love farming.

If you want to learn more about how the skills of the farmer can benefit the gardener, take a look at Madison FarmWorks (our vegetable garden business) on our website.