Trade Some Roots for Feet?

Our official “field season” starts in very early March when we seed our first onions and leeks in the greenhouse. And it ends when we plant garlic, put away the tractor, and turn off the water in late October. In between, we grow a lot of food. That’s how we think of what we do when we want to feel good about ourselves anyway. But some days we cannot avoid the truth of the matter, which is that most of the time what we do is just haul stuff around.

I don't want to minimize the importance of the food that we grow. We certainly would not bother to do so much hauling if all we had to show for it was some pulled muscles. But every now and then Jake and I stop and look at each other at the end of the day and realize that really all we did was lift and carry and move stuff around. Ah, the glamour of farming!

It all starts with those onion and leek flats in March. In order to make the potting soil for our seedlings, we have to haul compost, black peat, and a bunch of other ingredients into the greenhouse. We seed many hundreds of flats every year, so there is a lot of potting soil to carry around. After we make the soil, fill the flats and seed them, the flats germinate in our germination chambers. Then they get moved out to the greenhouse proper where they grow for a few weeks before starting their daily relocations in and out of the greenhouse. We move them in and out because it is good for them to be outside in the sun during the day (plus we run out of room in the greenhouse), but the nights are still too cold for them. In the past we had to carry one flat in each hand and make many trips. This year we made “stretchers” that hold 10 flats each, so two of us can move a lot more in each trip. Now the process is much faster, but much heavier. Once the seedlings are hardened off, we take them for one last trip out to the field where they are finally put in the ground.

More than once, I have wished that our seedlings started out with feet instead of roots so that they could move themselves around a bit!

After hauling hundreds of buckets of compost and bales of mulch and flats of seedlings all season long, we are now in the fall hauling season. This time of year, we move hundreds of t-posts from the tomato trellis back out of the field and into storage; we wind up thousands of feet of irrigation line and row cover; and we broadcast hundreds of pounds of cover crop seed into the fields for winter. It is a good thing we build up our strength moving crates of vegetables around all season as well, because the fall squashes and carrots and potatoes are much heavier than the spring lettuces and radishes.

For me, it is the hauling of the actual vegetables that impacts me most. As you all know, our vegetables are grown at Troy Gardens and you come to pick them up at Troy Gardens. Some of you might not know that after they are harvested and before you pick them up, they are stored in our cooler in the basement of building 14 on the Mendota Mental Health campus (where Community GroundWorks rents office space). Every crate is hauled down 6 steps and across the basement to our cooler. Then back out and up those same 6 steps, onto our truck, and finally to the CSA pickup. Like I said, sometimes it feels like our real job is just to haul stuff around.

After today, there are two more weeks of vegetables that will need harvesting and hauling. Thanks so much for the role you play in actually hauling them home very week. Knowing you are eating these vegetables that still come with roots instead of feet makes it all worthwhile!
This sweet potato recipe comes from farm intern Laura Stoesz. If you still have some of the black beans from the share a few weeks ago, this recipe will be a great way to use those as well. Laura says, “The cinnamon-cumin spice combination is one of my favorites. You can bake the burritos as suggested in the recipe, or for quicker prep just warm the tortillas in the oven and serve. If omitting the baking step, cover the sweet potatoes and cook them a bit longer before adding the beans.”

Black Bean Sweet Potato Burritos
Adapted by Laura Stoesz from Simply in Season by Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert

3 cups sweet potatoes (peeled and diced)
1/2 onion or leek (chopped)
2 cups cooked black beans
1 tsp. ground cumin
3/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp. salt
8 flour tortillas
1 1/2 cups cheddar cheese (shredded)

Divide bean mixture and cheese among the tortillas and roll up. Place in a 9x13 baking pan. Cover pan with foil and bake at 350F for 20 to 25 minutes. Garnish with sour cream, salsa, and fresh cilantro.

Recipe

Fried Green Tomatoes
from James Burnham who is a CSA member with Sweet Magnolia Farm

BATTER
Flour and cornmeal (equal parts; ½ cup each should be enough for 3 tomatoes)
Black pepper (enough so that you can see it in the dry mix)
2 tsp. salt (or more if you want)
3/4 cup milk
1 egg
Canola or Peanut Oil

Mix dry and wet ingredients separately. Slice tomatoes 1/4" thick. Dunk in egg/milk and drop into dry mix, coat both sides. In a 9" skillet (cast iron, preferably), get enough oil for it to be ~1/8" inch deep in the pan. Use a higher-temperature oil (canola usually, but peanut is better) and get it hot, almost smoking. Reduce the heat to medium/medium low, toss in the prepared tomato slices and watch 'em. Cook 'em 'till they’re golden brown on both sides and soft in the middle. Don’t mind the bits of batter that come off in the pan. Adjust heat as needed and drain 'em on paper towels/newsprint when they’re done. Mix all sauce ingredients together and dip. Enjoy!

DIPPING SAUCE
1 Tbs. mayo
2 Tbs. mustard of choice
1 dash of sesame seed oil
4 tsp. chipotle hot sauce

2012 Farm Fresh 365 Calendar

Troy Community Farm is the month of June in this new calendar from the Madison Area CSA Coalition! The calendar features original, seasonal menus and highlights 12 local farms. This year’s edition is particularly user friendly thanks to its standard calendar size (8.5” x 11”), allocated margin space for notes, and interactive smart phone feature. Follow this link to order your copy directly from MACSAC:
http://www.csacoalition.org/online-store/

Troy Community Farm
(from the calendar)

We have been growing certified organic food on Madison's northside since 2001, and we are proud to be the city's first urban farm. Our production focus is on intensive hand-scale techniques that make the most of limited urban spaces. We also emphasize reduced fossil fuel inputs by growing starts in our passive solar greenhouse, cultivating only with wheel hoses and hand hoses, and using carefully managed cover crops, mulch, and crop rotations to improve soil productivity. In addition to growing vegetables, herbs, and sprouts for our CSA and for local groceries and restaurants, we also strive to grow future farmers though our internship, worker share, and volunteer programs. Our off shoot business Madison FarmWorks, will even grow vegetables for Madison residents in their own yards.

Troy Community Farm
Claire Strader • 442-6760 • claire@troygardens.org
www.communitygroundworks.org