

In the Share

Italian or French Beans, 1 bag
Beets or Cabbage, 1 bunch or 1 head
Scallions, 1 bunch
Peppers, 2 long & 1 large or 2 small
Eggplant, 1 piece
Summer Squash, 4 pieces
Basil, 1 bunch
Garlic, 1 head
Slicing Tomatoes, TBA
Cherry Toms., members 76-99 & 1-5

I have been watching and waiting for the sweet peppers to mature to their full red or orange color for weeks. This week it finally happened! And it was well worth the wait. Peppers that have matured to their full color are much sweeter and more delicious than the usual green peppers. It is hard to wait, especially since some peppers will blemish or even rot before they mature, but oh the flavor. Now that the green beans will be gone for a while, I will console myself with as many sweet peppers as I can eat – raw on sandwiches with pesto spread and tomatoes, sautéed with onions in pasta sauce, stuffed with dhal, in ratatouille... Yum!

The eggplant is lovely, through varied in size and type. The crop has been struggling so, I was happy to get one for each of you at least. If you got a fat eggplant (deep purple or neon colored), it is the usual globe type. If you got a long, skinny one (also purple or neon), it is a Japanese type known to be less bitter and more tender, though smaller. See the ratatouille recipe on the back to use either one.

Both the beets and cabbage are slow to mature this year, so this week you must choose between them. With a bit of rain and some favorable weather both these crops should be back by the fall.

Next week look for more carrots, salsa, peppers, tomatoes, onions, and garlic. I'm hoping cucumbers will be back in a week or so as well.

Claire's Comments

Tomatoes, the Flavors

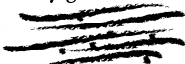
Last week I talked about tomatoes as a crop in general, about how they rule the weeks of late August and early September. This week while the harvest of these fruits is still increasing (about a half ton last week, this week three quarters of a ton...), I thought it might be fun to describe some of the different tomato varieties you are seeing in your shares. We did a blind tomato tasting with our interns after the harvest yesterday afternoon, so I have a bit "data" to add to the descriptions!

As I'm sure all of you know, heirloom tomatoes have been all the rage the past several years. Those that love them know that their flavor can be outstanding. As a farmer I have not been overly fond of these varieties because they tend to be soft, blemished, and prone to cracking. All these factors make them harder to grow, harvest, and sell, and also, along with their flavor, contribute to their generally higher price in the market. Some of the heirlooms you have been getting include Green Zebra (small and green striped), Brandywine (large and pinkish red), Golden Sunray (medium and all gold), Striped German (very large and striped yellow and red), Black Prince (small and very dark), and Nepal (medium and red). Together in a display or a salad these tomatoes are truly beautiful. And their flavors are as varied as their appearances. Some are tangy and acidic, others are more sweet and mellow, and still others have much less distinction than you would expect from an heirloom.

As the tender heirlooms have gained in popularity, the hybrids have been derided as flavorless and good only for shipping and storage. Most of the red tomatoes you get in your share are New Girl (small and red, often with green shoulders), Dafel (much the same as New Girl but slightly larger), or Estiva (medium and red and consistently blemish free). Over the years I have settled on these varieties as the most reliable in terms of production; they grow firm, clean, and plentiful fruits. My own preference is for a tangy tomato, and these deliver that flavor for me as well.

The results of our blind taste test of all these varieties and more (we grow 19 all together) surprised most of us. The top winner in terms of flavor was the hybrid New Girl – bred to be the first mature tomato in the garden. Virtually tied for second were Amish Paste (a red heirloom paste and Jake's favorite), Estiva (my favorite for beautiful firm fruits and wholesale production), and Golden Rave (a hybrid yellow paste we also grow for wholesale). Wow! Three hybrids in the top four! Not what we expected. After those four, the heirlooms came in (interspersed with some other varieties that I don't have space to describe) in the order I listed in the heirloom paragraph above.

The main thing I have learned from this taste test is not to judge a tomato too much by its appearance or its description as heirloom or hybrid. Even though the average ratings of our interns produced the results listed here, there was some significant discrepancy among their individual ratings. Everyone has their own tastes for tangy or sweet or mild and those need to be discovered by each individual. There sure are plenty of tomato tastes to explore right now! I hope you are enjoying the tomato bounty!



Recipes

My partner Sarah made this soup last night and it was delicious! She made it several times over the winter with our canned tomatoes, but last night's version with the New Girl seconds was the best ever. Notes on how she deviated from the recipe (and made it easier) are at the end. The recipe for the dumplings she used instead of garnish follows as well. It is a perfect meal for using up a lot of tomatoes!

Roasted Tomato Soup

Recipe adapted from The Essential Eating Well Cookbook as published in the Willy Street Co-op Reader.

8-10 ripe tomatoes cut in half
1 Tbs. olive oil
1 red onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
3 cups vegetable or chicken broth
3 Tbs. chopped fresh basil
Salt and black pepper to taste
3 fresh basil leaves, cut into ribbons
Fruity olive oil, plain yogurt, or garlic croutons – garnish

Preheat broiler or grill. Lightly oil a baking sheet with sides. Spread tomatoes, cut side down, in a single layer on a baking sheet. Broil or grill until skins are well blistered, about 10 minutes. When tomatoes are cool, slip off the skins and coarsely chop the tomato flesh. Heat olive oil in a 2-quart pot over medium-low heat. Add onions and cook about five minutes. Add garlic and continue to cook until the onions are soft. Combine tomatoes and onion mixture in a food processor or blender and process until smooth, and then return vegetables to pot. Add broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer about five minutes. Remove soup from heat and stir in chopped basil and salt and pepper to taste. Cover soup and refrigerate at least two hours. To serve garnish each bowl with a swirl of olive oil or yogurt or crouton and ribbons of basil.

Sarah's Notes:

- Don't bother to skin the tomatoes. The skins will get chopped up when you puree the soup anyway.
- Use one of those hand-held blenders that you just stick in the soup while it is still on the stove to puree. It is super easy and leaves enough chunks to make a great texture. In our house we call it "the tool."
- I have never refrigerated this soup. I always serve it fresh and hot from the stove.

Dumplings:

Mix together: 1 ½ cups flour, 1 Tbs. baking powder, ½ tsp. salt. Cut in: 3 Tbs. butter. Add to make dough soft: 2/3 cup water or milk. Drop dough by teaspoonfuls into soup after it is pureed. Cover tightly and cook 15 minutes. Thin soup with water if too thick.

Summer squash, eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, garlic. Just about everything you need for this recipe is included in your share this week! I love ratatouille and have no qualms about substituting as necessary to use up what I happen to have in the fridge. Here's a basic recipe to get you started.

Ratatouille

I found this recipe on the Internet. You can find others in the Asparagus to Zucchini Cookbook from MACSAC.

2 Tbs. olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 large onion, thinly sliced
1 small eggplant, cubed
2 sweet peppers, coarsely chopped
4 large tomatoes, coarsely chopped
3 to 4 summer squash, cut into slices
1 tsp. dried leaf basil
1/2 tsp. dried leaf oregano
1/4 tsp. dried leaf thyme
2 Tbs. fresh parsley, chopped

In a 4-quart Dutch oven or saucepan, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add garlic and onions and cook, stirring often, until softened, about 6 to 7 minutes. Add eggplant; stir until coated with oil. Add peppers; stir to combine. Cover and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally to keep vegetables from sticking. Add tomatoes, zucchini, and herbs; mix well. Cover and cook over low heat about 15 minutes, or until eggplant is tender but not too soft. Serves 4.



There should be enough basil in your share this week to make at least a batch or two of pesto. Here is a basic recipe to get you started. Substitute different nuts or add sun-dried tomatoes, parsley or cilantro to vary the flavor. If you make more than you can use on your sandwiches and pasta, just put the rest in the freezer for winter.

Walnut Pesto

3 Tbs. walnuts
2 cups fresh basil leaves
2 cloves garlic
3 Tbs. grated Parmesan
1 pinch sea salt
½ cup olive oil

Combine walnuts, basil, garlic, Parmesan cheese, and salt in a food processor and process to a puree. With the machine running, add the oil slowly. Scrape down the side and process again. Store pesto in the refrigerator in an airtight jar. Keep pesto covered with a layer of oil to prevent from browning.