

Local Roots Community Supported Agriculture

Box Contents for July 3rd

1 bunch Rainbow Swiss chard
1 bunch baby white turnips
¼# arugula
~1# broccoli
1 head red butter lettuce
1 bunch dill
1 head 'Samantha' red oakleaf lettuce
1 head fresh 'Music' garlic

Next week's produce (we think): salad greens – kohlrabi – lettuce – radishes – collard greens – carrots – fennel - zucchini (maybe!)

Large box additions

½# Sugarsnap peas
1 bunch carrots

Local Roots Farm News

Welcome to July! Over the course of this month, we'll migrate from the leafy-ness of the last several weeks into the delightful produce of early summer: zucchini, potatoes, cabbage, and peas (we hope) and beans.

Organic pest control

Thanks to a very mild winter, we had a good supply of kale, chard and root vegetables that survived until March and allowed us to make some early sales to our restaurant customers. The downside to the relatively warm winter was that a large population of insect pests seems to have survived as well. All over the valley we are hearing similar stories of heavy pest pressure on vegetable crops. On our farm, the worst damage came from a pest called a cutworm, the larva of the nondescript moth that flies around your light bulbs at night. The larvae live in the soil in the early spring, after hatching from eggs that were laid by (evidently) a large flock of moths that visited our field last fall. We first realized that we had a full-on infestation when seedlings in our earliest plantings of chard and broccoli began toppling over, severed at the soil line. Unlike other pests, which chew holes in leaves but leave the plant stunted but alive, cutworms completely kill plants with just a few little bites of the young stems. After losing an entire planting of broccoli (1400 plants) in just a couple nights, we decided to take a step we had never taken before. We bought *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a naturally occurring pesticide that is approved for use on certified Organic farms. Bt is a bacterium that kills insects when they ingest it. We started dipping all our seedlings in a liquid solution of Bt before transplanting them into the field, so that when the little cutworms start to nibble, they die before they can completely destroy our crop.

This was a big decision for us. In our first five years of growing, we had lots of crop damage, and occasional crop failure, due to insect pressure. But we never felt that the pest problems were so severe that they warranted pesticide use. In this case, we observed 50-80% loss of entire crops of broccoli, lettuce, chard, and kale, critical staple crops for our farm. The added cost and the time it takes to apply this relatively benign substance is minimal, and it has probably saved us from a profound economic loss.

Every year brings new challenges that require us to re-think our farming methods and adapt. We strive to minimize the "products" that we use to grow our crops, instead accepting a certain amount of damage and lost yield in exchange for a low-input system. When we do intervene to correct a problem, we will share that decision with you. We believe it's important for eaters to know what it takes to produce their food. Happy Independence Day!

Ideas and info for this week's produce

Broccoli – As I mentioned in the News section, we lost some of our early broccoli crops to a nasty little pest. Luckily, we have planted more broccoli than ever this year, and all the successive plantings look great. This broccoli is fresh, sweet, and juicy, completely unlike the junk that you get at the supermarket. Lightly steam, chop and sauté, or slice into spears and roast in the oven.

Rainbow Chard – Last summer was the year of the chard. Many of you got a little tired of the weekly bunch of bright green leaves, so you may be glad to hear that this is another crop that took a hit from our early pest problems. It looks like 2012 will be the year of the kale... In any case, here is chard's first appearance of the year. Chard (or Swiss chard, same thing) is in the same family as beets and spinach. It has a mineral-y, almost salty hint of flavor, and is very tasty simply steamed or braised in a little oil and water. Some people use the stems and some don't. If you opt to use your stems, separate them from the greens and start cooking the stems first. They take about 10 minutes more to cook, so add the leaves after the stems have begun to soften.

Fresh garlic – This is a special early-summer treat. Regular garlic has been "cured" by hanging up to dry for several weeks. Curing reduces the moisture content and allows garlic to be stored for many months. Fresh garlic, which you're receiving today, is full sized but uncured. It has a milder flavor and a wonderful sticky juiciness. Roast the whole head in the oven, or slice it up and add it to a pan of roasted kale or broccoli. The sugars will caramelize and it will taste like garlic candy.

Dill - Dill and turnips would make a great base for a July 4th slaw. Chop and add some arugula too.

Lettuce – Lettuce does not get any better than this. We are very proud of these beautiful plants. I'll include my best-ever homemade vinaigrette recipe in today's email.