



From Far Afield

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THERE IS SWEET CORN in your box for the first time this season. The corn had very good germination this year and is growing well.

Our yields were a bit lower in the harvest today because of some raccoon damage in the first planting of Spring Treat, our earliest corn variety. I have a live trap for catching and moving the raccoons, but so far this year I have had no luck. I guess they find the corn tastier than the bait I am using. They are pretty smart, those raccoons; they started eating the corn in the center of the rows and made sure to not pull it down anywhere near the outside,

where their activity could be easily observed. When I first noticed the damage, it was obvious that they had started by the back end of the Spring Treat (which butts up against the next variety, Luscious) and several rows in from the break path between the first and second planting. They worked down through the first row and when they were halfway through went back to the back of the rows and started on the next row in. I was able to discern this by the shredded ears and husks left behind: the dryness of the husks and browning of the cobs and remaining kernels make it obvious how long certain ears have been there in comparison to others. Thus they were able to conceal themselves as they were harvesting and also were able to conceal for longer the fact that it was happening at all. Ingenious... it occurs to me that I observe their habits and patterns to try and prevent them from eating the corn, but they are just as observant of the humans habits in order to prevent detection and maximize their harvest. So far this season they are winning....

Another issue with the corn, though it is not too bad yet this year is corn smut. Corn smut is a fungus which parasitizes sweet corn. When it infects the ear, it transforms the kernels into swollen, mushroom-like galls. These are actually edible with a sweet, earthy corn flavor. They are considered a delicacy in Mexico and parts of the U.S., where they are known as cuitlacoche, Mexican truffles, or corn mushrooms. When we find it we are trying to sell it at the stand to see if there is a market for it. But we lose a few ears of corn each

planting to that, too.

Anyway, back to the corn in your box this week. Full shares have 3 ears of Spring Treat and 1 of Luscious. Half shares get two ears of Spring Treat. Spring Treat is a solid yellow variety, whereas Luscious is a bi-color. Spring treat is the only solid yellow variety of corn we grow. We have three bi-color varieties this year. In order of ripening they are: Luscious, Brocade, and Lancelot. We do three plantings of each type of corn. By doing multiple plantings of multiple varieties we try and extend the corn season for as long as possible.

Most sweet corn grown in this country is now genetically modified (GMO). GMO seed is prohibited in organic certified agriculture, but were it not, we would still avoid GMO varieties. Many GMO supporters feel that those who oppose GMOs or do not wish to consume them are misguided or wrong-headed, caught up in a social hysteria. I feel that my personal reasons are well thought out and reasonable, and sweet corn is a great vehicle for illustrating why we do not grow GMO crops.

Most GMO sweet corn is modified in two ways. The first is to prevent corn borers and earworms. These insect pests both burrow into corn ears, eating kernels and fouling the ear. An organic preventative was Bt, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a ground dwelling bacterium the carcasses of which are contained a toxin to insects when ingested in concentrated amounts. The bacterium could be grown on a medium, sort of like

In Your Box

- 2 pound Purple Sun potato
- 4 ears corn
- 1 pound mixed green and yellow beans
- 1 tomato
- 1 bunch carrots
- 1 bunch red beets
- 2 fresh sweet onions
- 1 head garlic
- 1 lettuce
- 4 cucumber
- 2 pounds zucchini
- 1 zapalito squash
- 1 patty pan squash
- 1 yellow straightneck squash
- 1 bunch chard
- 1 bunch peppermint
- 1 bunch parsley

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bread yeast is, and then the carcasses could be mixed in a powder. Bt was used for years by many organic growers to dust corn with signs of borer damage. This was targeted, reactive usage, and in the open environment the carcasses would quickly disintegrate, breaking the Bt toxin into harmless compounds, making it much less likely to cause casualties among beneficial insects or earthworms. Monsanto had the idea to genetically engineer crops to produce the Bt toxin in every cell. This meant that farmers would no longer have to monitor for borers and earworms and would no longer have to apply Bt or more toxic insecticides. Any part of the corn eaten by insects would be toxic. But there are other possible consequences. Corn produces enormous amounts of pollen, pollen which is carried by the wind to pollinate other plants. This pollen lands on more than just other corn plants, however, and anything it does land on has been effectively dusted with Bt. So any insect mouth which eats a plant (or insect) which has been dusted by GMO corn pollen is served a lethal dose of Bt. Also, unlike the relatively small amounts of direct applied Bt powder, the Bt in plant parts does not break down or dissipate quickly, so any plant material eating when, say, corn remains are tilled into soil will be deadly for anything eating it. Not to mention that though it is not deadly to humans, warning labels on Bt warn against breathing or ingesting Bt toxin. And in an ear of GMO corn you get it in every bite. There is one more effect, too. Continual exposure to an insect control more quickly leads to insect resistance. Bt was a last recourse for many organic farmers (we have never used it on our farm), a relatively safe and environmentally benign solution. GMO corn is drawing a close on that option.

I will say more on this topic next week. Enjoy your produce.

Tabouli

This Middle Eastern cracked wheat salad is delicious, and is especially nice on hot days.

1 cup raw bulgur
1 large tomato
1 cucumber, peeled, quartered lengthwise and sliced
1/4 to 1/2 cup chopped parsley, to taste
3 tablespoons minced onion
3 tablespoons minced fresh mint
Juice of 1 large lemon
Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

Put bulgur in a heatproof bowl and pour over two cups of boiling water. Cover and let sit 20-30 minutes, until liquid is absorbed. Fluff with a fork, then add the remaining ingredients, stirring to mix thoroughly. Chill for 1-2 hours before serving.

You can add 1 1/2 cup of cooked chickpeas to make this a more substantial dish.

Chocolate Beet Cake

To the uninitiated, this cake sounds odd; but the addition of beets makes an incredibly rich, moist cake.

- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 cup beets, boiled and grated
- 2 1/2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 cups sugar
- 1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3/4 cup canola oil
- 4 eggs, beaten, or 1/2 cup mashed silken tofu plus an additional teaspoon lemon juice and additional teaspoon baking soda
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 cup soymilk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. Grease one 9x13 inch pan. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Sprinkle lemon juice over beets, set aside.
2. Combine flour, 1 teaspoon salt, soda, white sugar, cocoa, melted butter, eggs, honey, milk, and 2 teaspoons vanilla in a large mixing bowl. Stir in beets. Beat 2 minutes at medium speed of mixer. Pour into prepared pan.
3. Bake at 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) about 40 minutes. Cool and frost, or dust with confectioners sugar and top with berries, if desired.