



# From Far Afield

A newsletter of the Tolstoy Farms CSA - June 17 & 20, 2015

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**W**ELCOME TO WEEK TWO of our CSA season. Many things are similar to last week, but for a few additions.

You have some strawberries this week. The strawberry is not a true berry, which have their seeds on the inside of their fleshy bodies; the fruit body of the strawberry is actually a swollen flower receptacle. The seeds on the outside are dried fruiting bodies, known as achenes, which each contain a single seed. Strawberries have been cultivated for millennia, and different species were cultivated in the Americas and in Europe pre-Columbus. Strawberries are grown throughout the world; California alone grows over a billion pounds per year. Strawberries are high in vitamin C, with eight berries containing as much as a large orange.

Our strawberries did not do well this year, which surprised all of

us on the farm. We had thought the warm dry weather during the time the strawberries were blooming would be ideal for high fruit set, but the plants made very few blossoms, which translates into few fruit. Most years poor fruit set has been attributable to cold, wet weather, which wets the pollen and suppresses pollinator activity, but this year the opposite seems to be true: it was too hot and dry early in the season, which can suppress the formation of blossoms and, thus, fruit set. We have ruled out pests (though there are insects which damage strawberry flowers, none were seen by us and for the small blossom set to have been caused by insects they would have been obvious), as well as disease (all of the market garden patches as well as nearby home gardens with strawberries of various varieties had similar poor sets on healthy plants). So, some years the weather is too cool and wet, this year it is too hot and dry. Strawberries are a finicky lot and cause much teeth gnashing here on the farm. In any case, enjoy this week's berries, because it is not looking too good for more of them this year.

You have some peas this week, sugar snap peas. **Snap peas**, after topping and removing any string, are eaten pod and all. Snap peas are delicious fresh in salads or eaten out of hand, and are also quite good cooked in stir fries, casseroles, pot pies and soups. They were created by crossing snow peas with a mutant shell pea by a couple of plant breeders in Twin Falls, Idaho. Snap peas are very nutritious, with a 3.5 ounce raw serving containing, along

with fiber and protein, 75% of the US RDA of vitamin C. The amount you have this week will mostly be good for eating out of hand or putting into salads.

You have a bunch of **arugula** this week. Arugula has a spicy peppery flavor, with a nuttiness which makes it unique and distinctive. Native to the Mediterranean, it has been grown since roman times. In ancient Rome it was thought to be an aphrodisiac, and was mixed with lettuce in salads to counter this effect, lettuce being thought to have a calming soothing effect. In addition to being delicious added to salad or as a main salad ingredient, arugula is delicious used raw in pasta dishes or with meat or seafood. You can try it how Joe likes it: put it on pizza just before or just after removing from the oven.

All told the garden is looking good so far. The potato, squash, and cucumber plants are all mulched with straw and growing vigorously; we are getting the last of the greenhouse lettuce cleared out and are moving to the field lettuce; the carrots and corn are looking healthy and well weeded at the moment. Keeping things weeded gets hard this time of year, with two markets and CSAs to harvest for and keep on top of, but we have a good crew and so far things are looking good.

Do let me (Tim) or Joe know if you have any problems, questions or comments. Enjoy your produce.

## *In Your Box*

- 2 head spinach (~1 1/2 lb.)
- 1 lettuce
- 3 pints strawberries
- 1/3 lb snap peas
- 1 bunch radish
- 1 bunch turnips
- 1 bunch Swiss chard
- 1 bunch mustard greens
- 1 bok choy
- 1 bunch arugula
- 1 bunch garlic scapes
- 1 bunch green onions
- 1 bunch sage

## Spinach Pie

- 1lb 4oz spinach, washed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 10oz cottage cheese
- 10oz Parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Steam the spinach, drain well and roughly chop. In a large bowl, mix the cooked spinach with the onion, beaten eggs and both types of cheese. Beat well and season with pepper and nutmeg.
3. Transfer mixture to one large pie dish, or individual dishes if using. Bake in preheated oven for 25–30 minutes.

## Pasta with Scape Pesto

- 10 large garlic scapes
- 1/3 cup unsalted pistachios
- 1/3 cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 pound spaghetti
- Handful of arugula, chopped

**Make the pesto:** Puree the garlic scapes, pistachios, Parmesan, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in a food processor until very finely chopped. With the motor running, slowly pour the oil through the opening. Season the pesto with salt and pepper to taste. (The pesto keeps in the fridge, covered, for 1 week or frozen for a month.)

In a large pot of heavily salted boiling water, cook the spaghetti until al dente. Reserve 1 cup of the pasta-cooking water, then drain the pasta. Whisk together 2/3 cup of the pesto and the reserved pasta water and toss with the pasta and arugula. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve right away.

## Sage Herb of the Week

An ancient herb, Sage is popular as a potent condiment for meat, fish, Mediterranean dishes, and English Sage Derby Cheese. Sage comes from the Latin word *salvere*, which means salvation. It was once so valued by the Chinese that they traded green tea for sage at a ratio of 4 to 1. In Yugoslavia today, fields of sage are planted and harvested like wheat: three times a year for culinary use. Sage has many uses: culinary, aromatic, ornamental, cosmetic, craftwork, as a dye, and as a preservative. It has even been smoked as a tobacco. It is an ingredient in perfumes and soaps. Sage has antibacterial properties, making it a natural preservative for meat, poultry, fish, and condiments. Sage is the herb par excellence for stuffing, eggs, and cheese. It has a smoky, musky flavor. Its astringent property makes it excellent for cutting the richness of food. It is one of the best herbs with fatty meat such as pork, sausage, duck, goose, and lamb. It is eaten fresh in salad. Add it to soups, marinades, artichokes, tomatoes, asparagus, carrots, squash, corn, potatoes, eggplant, snap beans, leeks, onions, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, oranges, lemons, garlic, lentils, and shell beans. Sage sprigs can be deep fried and used as a garnish for roast meats. Mince fresh sage leaves and add to any breading.

## Our Organic Promise

Our farm has been Certified Organic for about a quarter century. Before being certified, our community used and was dedicated to using organic methods for decades. The intentional community which our farm acreage is a part of has organic methods stipulated in its bylaws, and the land on which we farm has never had synthetic chemical inputs or applications. We are dedicated to having healthy, sustainable, productive farming without the use of synthetic chemical inputs. Whether as pesticides, fertilizers, seed treatments... we will farm without them. This is our promise to you. It is an easy promise for us to make, because for us this is not simply a means of production or a revenue stream; it is a way of life.