



Tucson Community Supported Agriculture

Newsletter 147 ~ July 21, 2008 ~ Online at www.TucsonCSA.org

Summer `08

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Farmer Frank

Grass-fed Pork?

Several members asked if the pork available last week at the CSA was grass-fed. The answer: there is no such thing as grass-fed pork. Pigs are omnivores, like us, and unlike ruminants such as cattle, sheep and goats, they are not designed to eat and digest grass.

This pork was from Bernie Guzman, owner of the Guzman Meat Processing facility in Cochise, which frequently processes our grass-fed meats. Bernie raises his pigs naturally, out of doors, without hormones, antibiotics or any other chemicals. The smoked or cured cuts (hams, hocks, bacon) were processed without nitrites. The pigs' diet consists mainly of grain, which pigs, unlike cattle, are perfectly designed to eat.

Due to popular demand, we'll have some more pork in August.

Newsletter editors

Philippe Waterinckx

FARMER FRANK SAVES HEIRLOOM ONIONS FROM EXTINCTION

There is something special about the onions we've been getting recently from Crooked Sky Farms – they are the farm's very own onion variety. It is an heirloom variety of sweet onions native to the Phoenix Basin. The seeds of those onions used to be distributed by a well-known seed company. Recently, the seed company decided to discontinue the variety. It is quite a significant event in the world of heirloom seeds when a seed company discontinues a seed it holds the rights to. That variety may become extinct if no one else acquires the right to distribute it.

When Farmer Frank (pictured left) from Crooked Sky Farms heard of this, he approached the seed company and purchased the rights to trademark and distribute that onion's seeds. He subsequently renamed it Glendale Gold Little Sweetie Onion, and has been growing those onions on his farm. They are the yellow onions the Tuesday and Friday members have been receiving in their shares over the past few weeks.

Unfortunately, heirloom varieties are becoming increasingly rare as seed distributors move to newer hybrids. Large seed companies prefer hybrids because growers can't reliably reproduce the plants by collecting the seeds. Instead, they must purchase all their seeds from the seed company. Protecting heirlooms from extinction preserves the genetic diversity of our crops. Scientists point out that genetic diversity may be especially important as climate change occurs – some varieties may show greater ability to adapt and thus prevent widespread crop failures. Thanks to grass-roots seed-saving organizations, non-profit seed-saving organizations such as Native Seeds/SEARCH, heirloom seed companies, and individuals such as Farmer Frank, the genetic material of some heirloom varieties is being preserved.

HAMI MELONS



The melons in the Crooked Sky Farm share this week (and last week) are Chinese melons (not Japanese, as we previously thought – sorry!). They originate from Hami, in the Xinjiang province of China, and are referred to as Hami melons. There are more than 180 varieties of Hami melons with different shapes, sizes, and skin and flesh colors. Their size ranges from as large as a cannonball of over a dozen kilograms to as small as a coconut. They are mainly elliptical in shape and come in yellow, green, brown and white, with various dapples (color patches). Their flesh ranges from green to yellow to orange and is crisp and refreshing. Hami melons are known for their nutritional value and medicinal properties and have traditionally been used to improve hematogenous (blood) function and treat nephropathy (kidney disease), stomach bug, cough, anemia, and constipation. They are known to relieve fever and dispel the heat, so they are a healthy choice on hot summer days.

SHARE SWAPPING

Members sometimes comment on differences between the produce on different pick-up days. Some Agua Linda members wish they could enjoy some Crooked Sky produce while Crooked Sky members envy the greens which Agua Linda members are still receiving. Hey, we're liberal – we encourage share swapping! If anyone wishes to experience the other farm's produce, just place or respond to an ad on our corkboard (above the trading baskets). We encourage our members to contact each other and find ways to enjoy each other's shares. **Please note: the corkboard also currently lists a few ads from folks hoping to get shares from CSA members who might be out of town for a while. Anybody?**

More Okra Tips

I luckily have come to consider okra's gumminess a virtue rather than a curse. But if its gumminess puts you off, here are more ideas contributed by several of our members (thank you members!):

1. Always process the okra in a totally dry environment: the pods must be completely dry before processing, as must be your cutting knife if you elect to cut the pods.
2. Use whole okra instead of cut okra. Just trim off the end without puncturing the pods.
3. If your recipe calls for cut okra, pre-process the okra by spreading the cut okra on a plate covered with a paper towel. Microwave for 2 to 3 minutes. Then cook according to your recipe.
4. Don't overcook it, and only stir it very gently during cooking (rough handling releases the gumminess).
5. Stir-fry or grill it.
6. Make a lengthwise slit in the pods and steam for 5 minutes or until tender. Stuff pods with seasoning of your choice.

If you have anti-gummy tips of your own, please e-mail them to us. We'll pass them on. Thanks!

More about Verdolagas (Purslane)

westonaprice.org

Although purslane is rarely seen on our own tables today, this pretty herb has a long and interesting history. English medieval cooks and gardeners loved purslane. The ancient Greeks made a bread flour from purslane seeds and pickled its fleshy stems; Greek country cooks now serve purslane as a salad herb, either alone or with other khorta (wild greens). On Mexican tables, the hot, peppery bite of cooked purslane is enjoyed with eggs and pork, while Chinese cooks value its sharp flavor and slightly slippery quality with noodles.

Closer to home, the FDA lists purslane as a pervasive weed (the 7th worst, worldwide) but to those of us who love its earthy, slightly acidic flavor and crisp, succulent stems and leaves, the word 'weed' hardly seems fair. Purslane is simple to grow and there are several varieties available to the gardener - the two best culinary ones are both summer herbs: portulaca oleracea (green purslane) and portulaca sativa (golden purslane).

Medieval herbals describe purslane as 'cold,' meaning that it was considered a cure for a 'burning' (or malfunctioning) heart and liver. Greeks call it a 'blood-cleansing' herb. In Mexico, purslane is considered good for diabetics. Recent research has confirmed that purslane is one of the best vegetable sources of omega-3 fatty acids, as well as carotenes and vitamin C.

Purslane is one of my own favorite green vegetables. Clusters of its young, fresh leaves are a perfect foil to 'sweet' vegetables such as new potatoes, beets, fava beans and garbanzo beans, and juicy vegetables such as cucumber and tomatoes. Or, simply sprinkle the leaves generously with coarse sea salt, lemon juice and olive oil and serve with fish, grills, or omelets. My neighbor on Crete used to add handfuls of purslane sprigs to the juices in the roasting pan, once he had removed the roast for carving. After a few minutes of swishing, the greens would wilt and the sauce would acquire a sharper flavor and pleasantly gelatinous character.

Rosemary Barron, author of Flavors of Greece, Grub Street, London, 2000

Verdolagas Salad

1 bunch verdolagas
Tomatoes, approx. 1 cup chopped
Cucumber, approx. 1 cup chopped
1 onion, chopped
Juice of a lemon, or 1-2 tablespoons vinegar
3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

Make sure to rinse the verdolagas well in several changes of water.

Chop or tear the verdolagas in bite-size pieces.

Toss all the ingredients together in a salad bowl and serve.

Hami Melon Salads

Cut melon in bite size pieces. Dressing options:

1. Sprinkle with salt and vinegar. Or
2. Sprinkle with lime juice, salt, and chile powder.

Serve chilled.

Grilled Nopales

Adapted from azcentral.com

With a sharp knife, make shallow parallel incisions on each side of the pads, about 1/3-inch apart.

Brush each pad lightly with olive oil. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. In a grill pan or a cast-iron frying pan over medium-high heat, or on an outdoor grill, sear the pads, allowing three to four minutes per side, until they are yellowish green with charred spots. Press down on the pads with a potato masher, if necessary, to keep them in contact with the surface of the pan.

When tender, remove from grill. Serve whole or sliced in strips. Add to salad or serve as side dish.