



Tucson Community Supported Agriculture Newsletter

April 25, 2006 – Issue 33

Spring 06
Week 8 of 13

This Week's Share

Beauregard sweet potatoes
Red LaSoda potatoes—**new!**
Garlic
Navel oranges
Salad mix
Cilantro
Sugar snap peas
Sweet onions—**new!**

Recipes in this Issue

Spring Onion Sandwiches
Sweet Onions on Black Bread
Sweet Onions on Toast
Deep-Fried Onion Rings
Roasted Potatoes with Garlic and Thyme



Nine more kids were born between April 17 and 21 at Black Mesa Ranch: Thatcher (above), Benson, Hershey, Taffy, Sprint and Hooker (twins, above), Farley, Zagnut, and Zero.

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Santa Cruz River Farmers' Market Grand Opening

The Santa Cruz River Farmers' Market will have a reopening celebration on **Thursday, April 27** from **3-6 pm**. The celebration will include mariachis, free food samples and demonstrations, and nutrition games for children. Find a fresh selection of locally grown seasonal produce, plants, citrus trees, cacti, and herbal remedies, as well as Mexican sweet breads, empanadas and tortillas. The Santa Cruz River Park is located at 600 North Riverside Drive, just west of I-10 on Speedway and east of Grande Avenue.

First Sweet Onions of the Season

This week we receive a fresh crop of **sweet onions**, just out of the ground and the first of the season. **What makes an onion sweet?** Sweetness in onions is more accurately termed "lack of pungency or mildness." Sugar levels don't really determine whether an onion will be sweet: some pungent onions actually have more sugar in them than sweet onions, but the sugar is masked by a high amount of sulfur compounds. The low amount of sulfur compounds in sweet onions allows the sugar flavor to come through.

Farmer Frank grows the very popular Texas Grano 1015Y sweet onion, also known as the Texas Supersweet. The onion was developed by Texas A&M scientist Dr. Leonard Pike, who received the Arthur T. Potts Award two years ago from the Rio Grande Valley Horticultural Society for his development of the onion. Back in 1972, Dr. Pike was recruited to develop a disease-resistant onion with a large uniform size that was resistant to bolting (forming seed stems) and had a sweet and mild flavor. He introduced the Texas Grano 1015Y ten years later (the "1015" stands for the recommended planting date of October 15, and the Y for yellow onion). The onion has won contests worldwide.

Onion pungency is rated on a scale of 1 to 18. An onion that scores 1 has very little pungency when eaten raw. At 4 the onion taster begins to feel some heat, and anything above 6 you can't comfortably eat raw. Our Texas Supersweets score between 2.5 and 4.0. It's primarily the genetics of onions that make them pungent or sweet, but the sulfur content of the soil and poor growing conditions can add to the pungency. The higher the soil sulfur content, the more pungent the onion. Vidalia, Georgia is known for its sweet onions because it is an area of the country with naturally low sulfur levels. Growing sweet onions requires a delicate balance between having enough sulfur for proper plant growth but keeping sulfur levels low enough so the onion stays mild.

Any stress while the onion is growing also tends to make it more pungent. There is a natural variation of sweetness in onions from year to year, depending on the weather, fertility and any insect and disease damage to the crop.

Sweet Potato Reminder

"Nearly every time I bite into a roasted sweet potato, I ask myself if anything can be more delicious," writes cookbook author Deborah Madison. "With a salad, a roasted sweet potato makes an easy dinner that's rich in green and yellow vegetables." Your newsletter editor couldn't agree more—this is her version of vegetarian fast food (it does take a while for the potato to bake, but you can sit down and relax while the potato is baking). Last week, she made two simple, healthy, and highly satisfying meals out of a baked sweet potato and a wilted spinach salad. To bake, preheat the oven to 400°. Scrub the sweet potato and bake until very tender when pierced, 50-60 minutes for a 12-ounce potato. To serve, slice lengthwise, break up the flesh with a fork, and add the traditional pat of butter, chile butter, or even a little sesame oil. Season with salt and pepper.

What's Special

Sweet Onions

Sweet onions are relatively large, pale, and sweet, mild, and juicy. They're available only when fresh, and they don't keep much longer than a week. They are extremely perishable because of their high moisture content, deteriorating much more rapidly than stored onions.

This is the time of year to use onions in salads and to make onion tarts and pizzas, crisp sweet deep-fried onion rings, and onion sandwiches. Even if you do not normally enjoy onions in salads, you will probably find these appealing. The mild, crunchy, pale flesh is crisp and brimming with juice, but not overwhelming. If you do cook them, you want to use them in ways that will not hide their delicate taste. Do not use sweet onions to replace stored onions as seasoning! They lack the same "authority" as stored onions.

NUTRITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS: All onions are relatively low in calories, at about 30 per ½ cup; they are also low in sodium. Onions are a good source of vitamin C, potassium, folate, and provide an especially generous amount of fiber.

Spring Onion Sandwiches

Onion sandwiches are best made right now, when the new spring onions are very sweet. Spread two slices of bread with mayonnaise. Slice fresh onion very thinly and make a layer of onion slices on one slice of bread. Top this slice with the other slice of bread.

Sweet Onions on Black Bread

The combination of sweet onion and dark bread is classic. Peel and slice the onion thinly into rounds. Lightly butter two thin slices of dark rye or pumpernickel. Cover one slice with onions, season with salt and pepper, add a few drops of mild vinegar, and cover with the second slice of bread. This sandwich also tastes good with thinly sliced Cheddar.

Sweet Onions on Toast

Toast two slices of country, multigrain, or light rye bread, then spread each slice with plain or flavored mayonnaise. Sprinkle chopped parsley or dill over the mayonnaise on one slice, add thinly sliced sweet onion, and top with the second slice of toast.

Deep-Fried Onion Rings

Peel and slice sweet onions 1/8- to ¼-inch thick. Separate the rings and soak them in a mixture of half buttermilk and half milk for at least 1 hour. In a deep-fryer or a deep pot, heat 4 cups of peanut or vegetable oil to 365°F. Drain the onions and toss them in flour, shake them in a sieve to remove excess flour, and fry in small batches until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Drain, salt, and serve. Ground red chile or cayenne pepper also tastes good as a seasoning. Onion rings taste good as a salad topper, too!

New Red LaSoda Potatoes

This week we have a brand-new crop of Red LaSoda potatoes, just dug out of the ground. Potatoes form on underground vines started from small pieces of the previous season's crop, called seed potatoes. They produce most prolifically when temperatures are around 60°F.

New potatoes are best in the simplest preparations, where their delicate flavor and texture can be appreciated. Boiling, steaming, and roasting in the oven or in the fireplace suit them best. Because of their tender skins, new potatoes don't need peeling. Red LaSodas, with their waxy, dense flesh are best for gratins. Don't plan on keeping these potatoes very long: even under refrigeration, they will lose moisture through their skin skins.

As a society, we seem to have forgotten what many vegetables really taste like. Perhaps more than that of any other vegetable, the flavor of a freshly harvested new potato can be a revelation.

Roasted Potatoes with Garlic and Thyme

This type of roasting works particularly well with Red LaSodas, due to their fine, creamy texture and moderate moisture content.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Scrub the potatoes well in water and drain them. Choose a shallow baking dish or pan just large enough to hold the potatoes in a single layer. Toss the potatoes in the pan with olive oil; heads of garlic separated into cloves, peeled or not, as you prefer; sprigs of thyme or winter savory; and a splash of water. Season with salt and pepper.

Tightly cover the baking pan with aluminum foil and put in the middle of the oven. After 40 minutes, carefully lift one corner of the foil and check the potatoes for doneness. They should pierce easily with a small knife. If the potatoes are not tender, replace the foil and continue to roast until they are done. When they are, take them out of the oven and loosen the foil to allow the steam to escape. They can be kept warm for a few minutes before serving.

Potatoes can also be roasted in the fireplace or in the charcoal fire of a grill. Toss the potatoes with the garlic, seasonings, and water, as above, and seal them up tightly inside packets carefully folded out of three sheets of aluminum foil layered together, holding potatoes and garlic in a single, evenly thick layer. Roast the packets under coals of a fire that are dusty white all over but still glowing red in the center. Rake out the coals into a layer about 1 inch thick, place the packet on top, and then spread a light dusting of coals over the top.

The time they take to roast will depend on the heat of the embers, but 40 minutes to 1 hour is usually about right. Turn the packet over every 15 minutes or so, replenishing the coals underneath and on top as needed. When they are done, the potatoes will be soft throughout and lightly browned all over.