



High Ground Organics Community Supported Agriculture

Week 9, May 10th and 11th, 2017

Organic Strawberry Fields Forever!

by Stephen Pedersen

Those of you who have been faithful newsletter readers for a while know that we have been involved with the effort to transition the organic strawberry industry into using organically grown starter plants for some time now. Unlike all other crops which must be planted from starts that were produced organically, organic strawberry growers were given a loophole which allows them to use conventional plants when organic ones aren't available. The upshot is that nearly the entire industry is using conventional plants which results in annual releases of approximately 1.3 million pounds of ozone-depleting and toxic pesticides just to supply plants for "organic" fields.

The good news is that things are starting to change. As loyal readers will also know, our strawberry plants this season were 100% organically grown. A company call Innovative Organic Nursery has begun to produce high quality organic transplants in Shasta County. And a formal campaign, now called "Organic Strawberry Fields Forever: From Start to Finish", led by Lisa Bunin and Liana Hoodes from Organic Advocacy, has been formed to help educate growers, regulators and the public about this important issue.

Perhaps the most exciting news, however, is that we (as a group) have secured a grant from the Organic Farming Research Foundation to conduct on-farm trials comparing organically grown plants with conventional ones for yield and disease presence throughout next season. (There was an article about the grant in the Santa Cruz Sentinel last week.) This is a critical step in convincing large scale organic growers, many of whom can be quite conservative and resistant to change, to make the switch. If we can show them that organically grown starts perform as well, or better, than conventional ones—as I am quite convinced they will—they will really have no excuse.

Farewell to Andrew: This week we bid a fond farewell to our chef Andrew Cohen, who has graced the pages of our newsletter with his cooking suggestions and recipes for the past 6 years. We have appreciated his humor and expertise and could always count on him for something tasty, interesting and unusual! All of Andrew's recipes are on our website -- you can always search by vegetable to find anything you're looking

for, and we'll continue to have those links in the newsletter to relevant recipes. We look forward to seeing what Andrew does next!

Veggie Notes, by Jason Johnson

Always rinse produce before use. Everything should be refrigerated.

This winter, Molly and I spent clear days in the blueberry patch, hunched over tiny bushes, carefully pruning back branches. To watch a plant grow is to watch sunlight become motion, and to prune is to have a hand in that. Each branch represents exerted energy, and together they define the plant. Some efforts are fruitful while some are counter-productive. To prune is to promote healthy growth. It defines the human's role in the natural world. To consider the future, to create measurable change.

This week, I am extremely excited to taste the fruits of my labor. Blueberries are in the manzanita family, so their beautiful red stained bark is accented by waxy green leaves, small white flowers, and of course, the deep, velvety blue of the berries. These colors are something I want to capture in my kitchen this week. Two salads come to mind. One of green and red oakleaf, garden cress, green onions, blueberries, candied pecans, maybe some bleu cheese and definitely some avocado. Top with a white balsamic vinaigrette. This would be great as a side salad and a beautiful one to bring to a dinner party. The other is similar, but heartier. This one sees kale as the base, with chopped chard stems, green onions, avocado, blueberries, and quinoa. Some funky cheese and candied nuts would also go great in this one, along with a creamy balsamic dressing. The great thing about this salad is that it will hold up in the fridge. It would be a great one to make the night before and pack for the office.

Another great use for the berries this week would be to freeze them and use them for smoothies. A pint of frozen berries, an avocado, some kale, and the milk (or alternative) of your choosing would be a great breakfast alternative for when morning comes earlier than it should.

Garden cress is something that tends to get passed over at the market stand, and it really is a shame. Just one ounce of cress holds 40% of your daily vitamin A intake, and more vitamin C, pound for pound, than an orange. Carnivores can get familiar with these spicy little guys by pairing them with red meat. Use as a garnish for roasts and braises, as well as on sandwiches. They are also great in salads. I tend to use them the way I would a microgreen. Used modestly, they maintain balance with the rest of your salad while making themselves

In The Box

Red Oak Lettuce

Green Oak Lettuce

Garden Cress

Red or Rainbow Chard

Green Onions

Strawberries OR

Blueberries

Lacinato OR Scotch Kale

Avocado*

TBA

All produce is certified organic. Avocados are from Marsalisi. All other vegetables and fruit were grown by High Ground Organics. Note: last minute substitutions may be made.

heard with a nice, horseradishy spice. For that reason, they pair well with avocado.

This weekend has the potential to be the most beautiful of the year. With temperate weather and plenty of sunshine, I hope you find yourself taking time to enjoy the things that define you. As the sun takes a more active role in your life, consider which of your efforts are fruitful and which could be pruned away.

Enjoy your veggies!

Chef's Notes, by Andrew Cohen

This week I chose to focus on the blueberries you might get in the box as they are something I start to look forwards to as soon as they run out at the end of their season. (Wow, that's a long sentence!) The blueberries from High Ground are some of the best I've tasted, and I love to play with them as well as just eat them. The sauce made from them this week is something I came up with to pair with a bottle of Graciano wine from my other job at Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard/Quinta Cruz. Graciano is an unusual Spanish variety of grape that is savory up front, then has the flavor of blueberries in the finish. If you don't have access to graciano, try petite sirah instead.

The garden cress had two recipes drafted for it but they didn't get typed. One is a savory salad or topping that would be great on sword fish or another firm fish, or with grass-fed beef. This would also be very nice wrapped up in cold smoked salmon or gravlax. It is 2 cups cress, 1 cup thinly sliced scallions, 1-2 diced avos, and some mint chiffonade, then dressed with a little lemon and some bold olive oil. Another iteration sees ¼ inch dice Yukon Golds or Yellow Finn potatoes that are blanched and then sautéed until crisp, then tossed with cress, scallions, red wine vinegar or lemon juice, olive oil, and a drift of oregano or thyme. Use this as a side dish, combine with lettuces for a big salad, or top steaks with it. The cress is well suited to sandwiches, roll-ups and wraps, salads, or used as a topping for things like fish or poached chicken. The peppery quality of the cress is similar to a sharp mustard, so let that thought help guide you.

And that is the last newsletter blurb I'll be doing. With over a thousand recipes done, it is time to move on to other things. I am thinking a book called "Think Inside the Box" might be an idea, or maybe a blog. I'd like to thank Jeanne and Steve for the opportunity and platform they have provided me for my writing. It has been quite an experience. I'd also like to thank them for their efforts as a small organic farm. It ain't easy doing what they are doing, but it is vitally important, and I wish them all the best going forward. In Japan there is a saying that every time you try some new dish that you like, it adds 3 months to your life. It is always my hope that someone reads these recipes and finds something to extend their lives. Thanks to all of you that support the farm, and read my recipes.

Pan-Seared Duck with Blueberry Graciano Sauce, from Chef Andrew E Cohen

2 moulard or Pekin duck breasts, extra fat & skin trimmed & reserved, skin scored at ¼-inch intervals	½ tablespoon fresh thyme, minced
	1 tablespoon, more if needed, high-quality brandy
Salt & pepper to taste	Red Wine & Blueberry Sauce

Place the duck into a close-fitting non-reactive pan skin side up. Drizzle the duck with brandy, then season with a little salt and a

decent amount of coarsely ground pepper. Scatter with ¾ of the thyme. Flip and dress the same as above. Allow to marinate for a couple hours to all day in the refrigerator.

When it is time to cook, remove the duck from the refrigerator an hour or more beforehand. Allow the meat to come to room temperature, then blot the duck dry and brush away herbs and chunks of pepper.

Heat the oven to 400°F, and place the oven rack in the center. Begin heating a 10-inch pan with a heavy bottom, such as cast-iron, old school Calphalon, or All-Clad, over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot all the way up the sides, lay the duck into the pan skin side down (There is enough fat in the skin you don't need to oil the pan.) ensuring there is room between the breasts so they do not steam. Cook, without touching, for 4-5 minutes, or until a fair amount of fat begins to pool in the pan. Place a spatula or turner on the duck to hold them in place and pour off the fat into the container you have near at hand. Lift a breast a little and check the color. Keep pouring off the fat. After around 5-6 minutes, the skin should be golden brown and getting crisp. Flip the breasts over and let the bottom side get a little color, around 1 minute.

Flip the duck skin down again, drain any oil, then place the pan in the oven. Cook for 5-8 minutes until the flesh feels like the space between your thumb and forefinger when your hand is open and fingers are lightly spread, or the meat reads 120°F on an instant read thermometer. The meat will continue cooking- this is called carry-over- and the temperature will rise to 125°F, which is medium rare-ish, which is just the right temperature for duck. The meat should be pink with juices visible and a touch of light red in the center. Pull the pan, remove the meat, turning skin side up, to a cutting board or plate and angle a little so the meat is not sitting in its own juices. Keep warm with a piece of tented foil and allow to rest around 5 minutes so the meat relaxes. Cut at an angle across the grain, plate, and then drizzle with the Blueberry Red Wine sauce, drinking a wine that matches the sauce. Serve right away.

Wine & Blueberry Sauce for Duck, Chef Cohen

1 tbsp shallot very finely diced	2 2½-inch sprigs fresh oregano	½ cup Graciano or Petite Sirah
½ tbsp fresh ginger very finely diced	½-inch fresh thyme, leaves only, minced	Blueberry vinegar (see recipe on site)
1 tbsp high quality brandy	1 small basket ripe blueberries, washed	Grapeseed/sunflower seed oil as needed
Salt & Pepper	Butter as needed	

Heat a 1 quart chef's pan/1½ quart heavy bottom saucepan over medium-low heat. When the pan is well heated, film the bottom with oil and allow oil to heat through. Add one sprig of oregano/marjoram and cook in the oil, pressing down with a wooden spatula, until oil is fragrant with the smell of oregano. Remove and discard oregano.

Add the shallots and ginger to the pan and slowly cook until shallots are translucent and the ginger is soft. Add the brandy to the pan and warm 10 seconds, then ignite. Allow to reduce 80% and then add the blueberries, the thyme leaves and the second sprig of oregano or marjoram. Toss to combine everything and then turn heat to medium. Cook, tossing or stirring gently frequently to avoid burning anything, until some of the blueberries begin to split open from the heat. When the berries become fragrant, add the wine. Stir around and allow to come to a gentle simmer.

Gently cook the berries and stir, breaking down the berries a little bit. When all the berries are softened, remove from the heat and pull the herb sprig and discard that. Using a stick mixer, blender, or food processor, purée the contents of the pan until no lumps remain. Return sauce to pan, taste, and season with salt and pepper. Gently heat, and taste again. If the sauce seems a little flat, or lacking spark, add blueberry or red wine vinegar a drop at a time, stirring it well into the sauce before tasting. When the sauce seems bright and balanced, it is ready to serve. If you wish to enrich the sauce and make it velvety, add the butter cut into pea-sized bits and whisk in just before service. The sauce should be thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, but thin enough to pour and spread out.