



# High Ground Organics Community Supported Agriculture

March 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011

## Farm Practices, by Jeanne Byrne

As a certified organic farm, we get a lot of questions about how we grow our vegetables, what materials we use on our crops, and so on. While most non-farmers know very little about farming, a lot of people know a lot about gardening, and many people have done research about those aspects of farming that might affect their health or the environment. These issues include use of genetically modified seeds (GMOs), pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers; energy use; water use; and water run-off.

Any farm that is certified organic is required to adhere to a number of rules relating to these issues. While in some cases they don't go far enough, for the most part the requirements of certification are a guarantee that the farm is growing vegetables in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner. GMO seeds are not allowed in organic farming under any circumstance. Certified organic farmers are allowed to use non-organic seeds only if organic seed is not readily available for that variety; the seeds must be untreated (e.g. not predipped in fungicide). We use organic seed whenever possible, and we grow our own starts in our greenhouse so we have control over everything that goes into nurturing the young plants. We use organic cover crop seeds. We use organic seed potatoes. When available we use organic crowns to start our strawberry plants. This year we held over two acres of strawberries from last year that had started from organic crowns. (Organic crowns were not available at fall planting time for this year's crop. See Steve's article on this from 2010.) To us, using organic seeds is an obvious part of farming organically. The more farmers buy organic seeds the more organic seed the seed growers will produce.

While there are some organic-approved pesticides, such as Neem or Safer soap, we do not use any of these on our crops. We have a variety of ways to handle pest issues. As a diverse farm growing small blocks of many different vegetables, we are not subject to the same level of pest pressure that can develop on a many-acre crop of a single vegetable. A crop-specific pest can easily get out of hand with such a huge source of food in one place. Still we do have pressures from pests. The worst are probably the aphids that love our brassicas (broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, etc.). Rotating these crops to different areas of our farm, and tilling them in as soon as they are finished help to keep the aphid levels in check. We also provide substantial habitat (we have native plant hedgerows along most of our farm borders now) for beneficial insects on our farm who like to eat aphids and other crop pests. In addition, we plant Alyssum in rows between our brassicas and lettuces to attract beneficial syrphid flies—the larval form of the syrphid fly eats aphids. And we have a thriving population of ladybugs. In the case of strawberries, we

**Spring Open Farm Tour this Saturday April 2,**  
Saturday, 1:00-4:00: We'll spend a couple hours on a walking tour of the 23 acre property. Please get directions from our website. We're next to 701 Lewis Rd., Royal Oaks.

actually release a beneficial predatory mite to eat the tiny but terrible two-spotted mite that can be a huge problem for strawberries.

To improve the soil fertility our main approach is extensive use of cover crops and compost. When a crop needs a very high fertility (like strawberries) we use organic fertilizers made from feather meal, chicken manure, and fish emulsion. (Some day I'll tell the story of when Steve was fertilizing through the irrigation pipes and his backflow valve wasn't working properly—let's just say that it takes a long time to feel clean again after showering in fish emulsion.) The fertilizers we use are always certified for use in organic farms (and home showers).

Another environmental consideration in farming is the high energy use associated with tractors and transportation. Compared to the average distance travelled by vegetables consumed in the United States of about 1500 miles, we figure we're doing pretty good with our local delivery. In regard to tractor use, we use a lot less primary tillage in preparing our fields, partly because the cover crops improve the tilth of the soil so that it doesn't need as many passes with the tractor. Over the past 5 years, Steve has been making use of a conservation tillage disc to "recycle" beds during the year, so that he only lists up a bed once a year and uses it for successive crops without having to rework the bed.

Farmers raise up rows of soil into beds to provide good drainage and ease of cultivation and harvesting. We may get three or four successive quick growing crops from a single bed during the course of the season. In order to save tractor passes and preserve the microbial life in the soil, the conservation tillage disc incorporates crop residue and reworks the same bed up. This results in maybe half the tractor passes as would be used on a standard farm.

We conserve water wherever possible by irrigating only when necessary and using drip tape on crops that will be in the ground for a large part of the season. All our orchards, blueberries, strawberries, and squashes are on drip tape. In 2009 we were awarded the AWQA (Agriculture Water Quality Alliance) Stewardship Award for our practices preventing water run-off, including a buffer strip of willows planted in an existing drainage swale on our farm.

We are always looking for ways to improve our farming practices, keep our soil healthy, and maintain a thriving native environment around our farm. We encourage you to come out and see us this Saturday at our new Lewis Rd. property in Monterey county for a walking tour. Steve will talk about the year that he spent preparing this land to farm and his hopes and dreams for this beautiful little slice of ground.

## This Week

**Loose Red Beets**

**Romaine Lettuce**

**Red Leaf Lettuce**

**Mokum Carrots**

**Napa Cabbage**

**Shiitake Mushrooms**

**Meyer Lemons**

**Green Garlic**

**Flowers: Tulips**

## Veggie Notes/Storage Tips

Everything goes into the fridge as soon as you get home. Keep the mushrooms in their paper bag in the fridge, and use them early in the week. If you're not used to cooking beets, you can roast them as Andrew suggests below or boil them. They do take a long time to boil when they're big (give them up to an hour), but it's easy enough. Throw them in boiling water as they are, after a little scrub with a veggie brush. After you boil them you can run them under cold running water while you peel them by simply rubbing the skin off with your hands. Your hands don't get burned and the beets stay hot inside. At this point you can simply slice and serve as a side dish or try another preparation.

## Notes and Recipes from Chef Andrew Cohen

Looking into this week's box I see that I can take care of several prep jobs at once. First, I will start the beets to roasting. While they do that, I will wash the lettuces and spin them and then set them in a basket to finish drying. I store the lettuce in a box in the refrigerator so it is ready and waiting, just like the stuff in the bags at the store. Only no plastic here, and this way the lettuce keeps longer. While the lettuce dries, I will make a couple vinaigrettes—one for the salad and one for the slaw I will make of the napa cabbage and carrots. At least that would be the plan. I might just eat the carrots as is, or sauté them with the green garlic and thyme. Or I might steam the green garlic stalks and when they are tender, I would pour some cold vinaigrette on them and let them cool. Eat them cold or at room temp, or heat them up.

Well, I got sidetracked I see. The beets should be ready now, so I pull them out and as soon as I can handle them without burning myself, I peel and cut them into chunks, then douse them with some white balsamic, cider, or rice vinegar. Once cool, they are ready to be used as is in salad, or sautéed in oil with some lemon juice, or with some cinnamon and a splash of orange juice. Once cooked, beets will keep in the refrigerator for 5-6 days. The napa cabbage should be good for a slaw and for a sauté with the shiitake mushrooms, and maybe some green garlic and ginger. Use some napa sliced finely in the green salad. And if you yearn for summer, you could fire up the grill, grill some chicken, then split the romaine into quarters and rub it with a little oil and give it a quick grilling. Something like blue cheese or ranch dressing goes well here, or you could just squeeze some Meyer lemon juice over it with some olives and shreds of Parmesan. I know, sounds odd, but it's pretty good. I love Meyers for their bright sunshine yellow color as well as their low acid juice. I use the zest with minced herbs to spread on chicken or toss with oil cured olives, and I like to slice the lemon paper-thin and put it on toast with smoked salmon and avocado. Did you know the Meyer lemon came from China in 1908? It was brought over as a sample by a USDA employee named Frank Meyer. It is probably a hybrid of lemon and some sort of orange, giving it its underlying sweetness, and only in the last couple decades have they become well known and popular.

## Balsamic Vinaigrette, from Chef Andrew E Cohen

This dressing is good on any salad, and goes well with fruit salad, too. You can also heat it up and pour it over sliced mushrooms. This will cook the mushrooms and give them a "pickled" flavor, and they keep well for several days in the

refrigerator. They are good in salad and make a nice topping for grilled meat or poultry.

2 TBS good quality balsamic vinegar	6 TBS olive oil
1 garlic clove, peeled	½ tsp. fresh minced thyme, or thyme and marjoram mixed
1 pinch of salt and 1 big pinch of fresh ground black pepper	

Rub the bottom of a large non-reactive bowl with the garlic clove. Rub very vigorously, to the point of breaking down the clove. You want to see the oils from the garlic on the inside of the bowl. Allow a minute for the oil to dry in the bowl. This allows the flavor of garlic to infuse the dressing without making the dressing "hot" or leaving little spicy surprises in the dressing to imbalance the flavors. Add the vinegar, herbs, salt, and pepper. Allow a few minutes for the flavors to marry. Place the bowl in a dishtowel twisted into a ring to hold it in place, and begin to drizzle the oil in a thin stream into the edge of the vinegar pool, whisking vigorously to emulsify the oil. Do this until the oil is all incorporated. If the dressing still seems "thin", add a little more oil to achieve a thick "creamy" consistency. Use as needed. Store in the refrigerator, but be sure to pull it out 10-15 minutes before you want to use it.

## Napa and Carrot Slaw, from Chef Andrew E Cohen

This is a variant of an old standby around here, and is similar to what you get when you order Chinese Chicken salad. The dressing is good for many things—try it on sliced cucumbers. You can add things to this slaw to fancy it up easily; try chopped dates and peanuts, or raisins or green onions.

Dressing:

4 TBS unseasoned rice vinegar	2 TBS sugar
A pinch of white pepper	1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
12 TBS neutral flavored oil such as grapeseed or canola	

In a large bowl, whisk the first 3 ingredients of the dressing until the sugar goes into suspension (disappears). Whisk in the sesame oil. In a steady stream, whisk in the grapeseed oil to form an emulsification.

Slaw:

½ head napa cabbage split lengthwise (enough to yield 4 cups) finely sliced crosswise	3-4 carrots (enough to yield 2 cups), peeled and grated on the large hole of a box grater, or run through the medium comb of a Japanese mandolin
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In a large bowl, toss the cabbage and carrots to mix well. Add dressing a few spoonfuls at a time, tossing to coat the ingredients. When you have enough dressing to coat the ingredients well, the salad is ready. If you are adding other items to the salad, this is the time to do so. If you are not serving the salad right away, avoid adding things like peanuts, sprouts, or dates so they do not become "waterlogged" or wilt. When serving from the refrigerator, drain the slaw a little as the cabbage tends to "water out" as we say in the kitchen—meaning it gives off some liquid—and you do not want to serve soupy slaw.

Everything in your box and the flowers are certified organic. Everything is grown by High Ground Organics unless otherwise noted. This week the lettuce, beets, carrots, and cabbage are from Lakeside Organics. Mushrooms are from Far West Fungi. Flowers are grown by the Thomas Farm.