

Monroe Family Organics

CSA Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 23, 2012

Hello everyone! It looks like the weather has turned, and the fall harvest is under way.

Farm Update

This week we focused on harvesting, mostly for the purpose of getting our winter squash and sweet potatoes out of the field. That was a huge job! We did have a frost last week on Wednesday morning, which killed and damaged some of the warm weather crops, but most crops escaped fairly intact. Right now we have about two or three thousand pounds of our sweet potatoes out of the ground and still have about another 30% to get out yet. All of our winter squash is out of the field, and it is looking nice. Some of the butternut squash are enormous! The winter squash did not yield as many fruits because of some vine damage from the squash bugs this summer, but we will still have enough to give out to those who are fans of winter squash (we certainly are!). We'll have them in the shares in about two weeks, after they have a chance to sweeten a little in storage. We had a class from Alma College visit the farm on Thursday with about 30-40 students. They got to tour the farm, see the animals, and learn about our mission to provide healthy food to the local community.

This week for canning or preserving, we have large red beets for \$18 per half bushel, Roma tomatoes for \$12 per half bushel, and sweet potatoes which will be priced at \$1.35 for 50+ pounds or \$1.80 for 10lbs or more. We will offer the sweet potatoes for the rest of the fall. If you

are interested in the sweet potatoes, here is an important storage tip for you. Since they are a tropical root, they will not last as long in the refrigerator as they will sitting out at room temperature, much the same way as basil is a tropical plant that should be kept out of the refrigerator.



Squash and sweet potatoes ready to come to our house for storage.

What to Expect in This Week's Share

- ❖ Brussels sprouts or carrots
- ❖ Beans or potatoes
- ❖ Green pepper or green onions
- ❖ Beets or kale
- ❖ Sweet potatoes or salad mix
- ❖ Onions, Roma tomatoes, hot peppers, or decorative gourds
- ❖ Tomatoes or cherry tomatoes

Have questions or comments? Email us at mfororganics@yahoo.com or call Michele at

517-896-6884.

Crop Rotation and Cover Cropping

Even though crop rotation is a not very glamorous topic, it plays a major role in the quality of our crops. It is very common in the Midwest to see fields that have corn one year and soybeans the next. This is called crop rotation and it basically means following a particular crop with a different crop on the same space. The reason this is important is because if the same crop is grown over and over again, the soil starts to be depleted of certain nutrients. Then insects, disease, and nematodes that feed on these crops come in greater numbers because the plant isn't healthy enough to fight them off. When we plant another crop (let's say beets, for example) after lettuce, the newly planted beets will take different proportions of nutrients and are unlikely to be harmed by the pests that may have taken residence in the soil from the previous lettuce crop. However, continuous cropping (never giving the soil a break to store up nutrients) even with crop rotation can start to deplete the soil of organic matter and nutrients over time. That is why on our farm we also include winter rye grass into the rotation. This last year only about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre out of the 7 acres of production was not in either pasture or rye grass before having vegetable crops planted there. Late fall is usually when we plant the rye grass, as vegetables are done in the field, so we plant a cover crop. We were fortunate with the cover crop last year as the late fall allowed the rye grass to develop a very dense root system. This rotation of rye grass keeps the nutrients from leaching out of the soil when the snow melts in the winter. It also helps keep the soil held down so the strong winds and melting snow of winter don't take our soil particles and organic matter to a stream or elsewhere. (Continued on next page.)



Before this kale was growing here, we had rye grass planted on this plot. Before that, bell peppers grew here.



Lettuce used to grow in the coldframe where these tomatoes are now. When the tomatoes are done for the season, we will likely plant lettuce or spinach in this spot.



These sweet potatoes will be in this week's share. We love to eat them sautéed with brown sugar!

This rye grass is then tilled back into the soil in the spring, feeding the organic matter of the grass and its root system back to the soil before the next crop, such as tomatoes. These tomatoes would then benefit from the extra nutrients released from the breakdown of the rye grass in the soil and the better soil structure that occurs from the extra organic matter. We still have to add some compost, manure pellets, etc., but these inputs are minimized because of what the rye grass provided. There are also some biological benefits to the soil that are created by the cover crop, which are not completely understood, but an extra boost in plant health seems to occur on the following crop. This should give you a picture of how our crops are rotated through our fields, and the continuous rotation that helps our crops produce the quality that you expect from us.

Simple Root Vegetable Side Dishes

When I think of fall foods, I usually think of root vegetables. So in honor of the turning seasons and newly chilly weather, here are some yummy side dishes made with root vegetables. All of these are big hits at our house, and we eat them several times a week.

Sautéed Beets and Carrots

Ingredients:

Beets

Carrots

Cooking oil

Rosemary (optional)

Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Chop beets and carrots so that they are a roughly uniform size, and put them in a pan with cooking oil (we like olive oil, but other types work too). After a minute or so, add the rosemary. Cook, stirring occasionally, for a few minutes until the beets and carrots are soft enough to eat but not mushy. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Sweet Potatoes with Brown Sugar

Ingredients:

Sweet potatoes

1 tbsp butter

Brown sugar to taste

Salt to taste

Directions:

Peel sweet potatoes, then cut up into similarly sized pieces. Put into a pan with butter, and cook for a few minutes until they are soft enough to eat but not mushy. At the end, stir in brown sugar to taste, until the brown sugar and butter mix to coat the sweet potatoes. Add salt to taste.

If you have ideas for an article, or you would like to contribute a recipe to a future newsletter, please email mforganics@yahoo.com or call Michele at 517-896-6884.