

Monroe Family Organics

CSA Newsletter

DECEMBER 11, 2012

Hello everyone! As I write this there is snow on the ground and the winter season has finally come for good.

Farm Update

We have had a surprisingly busy fall, as sales to wholesale accounts were very strong for about 4 weeks after the last CSA drop-off. The availability of helpers was also getting lower at the same time. This combination has delayed our hoop house construction a little, but four of the tunnels now have kale, spinach, salad mix, and sorrel. Most of it is still fairly small but will be harvestable sometime later this winter. We still have some things like beets in storage, and a few things left in our smaller low tunnels, like carrots and spinach. This week we will be offering veggies again for pickup at the farm.

We were able to vacation in Florida with Michele's parents during the last two weeks of November. It was a great trip and a good break after a very busy season. While we were gone it got pretty cold and the chickens decided to take a little vacation from egg laying as well. We did not get as many eggs, but they started laying more about the time we got back. There will be some eggs available this week but not many.

Fred has started going through seed catalogues and doing the financial planning for the coming year. One thing we have noticed is there are more GMO varieties out there than we previously thought. There are quite a few sweet

corn and squash varieties on the market. Previously there were very few, but that seems to be changing in the vegetable world. Fred also went to the Great Lakes Vegetable Show in Grand Rapids last week to price new equipment, packaging, seed, and to see what new innovations and ideas might help us.

Just a reminder that December 20th is the cutoff for the returning member discount. That would make the cost of the shares Alma \$255 for a half share and \$495 for a whole. Mt. Pleasant and Midland would be \$280 for a half and \$505 for a whole. The cost will go up \$5-\$10 per half share after the 20th so it's not a huge savings but it's something to consider. We offer this incentive because it is better for us to have the CSA share money earlier when we spend a lot on supplies and equipment in January and February.



Right now, the fields are covered with a thick blanket of snow.

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

517-896-6884.

Spinach and the Winter

Though referenced a bit earlier in Persian writings, one of the earliest recorded accounts of spinach being cultivated was in the 7th century, as the King of Nepal gave it to the Chinese as a gift. During the Moorish empire, spinach first entered Europe through Spain by Arab Agronomists who developed the spinach we think of today. It grew immensely in popularity and was famously loved by Catherine de Medici, who requested that she have it for every meal. Even though spinach is now popular here in the United States, by far most of the world's spinach is still consumed in Asia. In fact, even though the US is the world's second leading producer at 3%, China actually produces 85% of the world's spinach.

Spinach has been an outstanding crop for northern small farms like ours and Fred has grown thousands of pounds of spinach in his lifetime. This time of year, the main thing that is still growing after all crops have stopped is the amazingly winter-hardy spinach. It has a unique ability to withstand extremely cold temperatures (well below 0F) as long as it does not get exposed to much wind while frozen. This cold hardiness lends to its origins back in Persia where it would sprout in the fall, withstand the cold of winter, and flower in the spring. The winter spinach has unique texture and taste compared to the regular field season spinach. The winter spinach has thicker leaves that are formed as the plant deals with the cold temperatures and often has a sweeter and stronger taste to it. This is because the plant is shedding water and accumulating sugars to make its tissues very resistant to freeze damage. One of the important factors to take into account in our winter production is to not harvest while the plant is frozen, or it will turn to mush as it thaws in the crate.



Above: This coldframe was recently planted with spinach, which is just beginning to sprout.

Below: Although there is snow on the ground, we are able to grow spinach underneath these low tunnels, which insulate and keep the wind off of the plants.





And under the snow... spinach!

To seed in the coldframe we use our field seeder and put the rows of spinach closer together. We then water thoroughly and cover with some type of used clear plastic. Then after it has sprouted we will take the initial plastic off and create secondary small tunnels over the emerged spinach. We use this method to prevent the ground from drying while the seed is germinating, and to prevent losses from mice eating a more slowly germinating seed. The secondary covering gives it another layer of protection from extreme cold so that the leaves do not turn yellowish, as can happen under prolonged exposure to single digit temperatures and below. Germination of the seed can still occur at very low temperatures

and can be seeded almost any time in the fall and winter (in the coldframe).



Spinach is considered a superfood because it is absolutely packed with vitamins and nutrient value. It usually ranks just a little behind things like kale for its food value. One note is that spinach is often said to be a good source of calcium, however only 5% is actually available to our bodies because of other biochemical factors. There was no additional information we could find on the nutritional differences between winter and summer spinach. However, we suspect that the nutritive quality is much better for winter spinach since there would be a less dilutive effect from the water content being lower in the leaf. Also, in our winter coldframe the plant is experiencing the most similar type of conditions that it would have naturally experienced in ancient Persia. That being said, spinach is good for you and delicious any time of year.



Despite being covered with ice, the Brussels sprouts are surviving quite well.

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.