

Monroe Family Organics

CSA Newsletter

OCTOBER 6, 2013

Farm Update

Hello Everyone! The weather has been very good this week, and it looks to be good in the coming week too as long as we don't get a frost. Everything in the fields is sizing very well, and even the tomatoes still have great flavor. The rain has helped push things along and so far has not spurred on any plant diseases. The pigs are really loving their muddy pasture, and all their snouts have been constantly covered with mud. The aphids have been driven off a little bit by the rain, which they do not like. Fred found a lot of dead ones after the rain on Friday night. Joe, our main worker besides Fred, had shoulder surgery this week and will be out the rest of the season. So we are going into the rest of the season a little more short-handed than we originally planned. It has been great to see everything looking so nice out in the fields! Usually this time of year, the crops in the field are starting to look a little rough as the weather turns. So far things look as good, or better than they have all season, so we're hoping they hold on for a while.



The tomatoes are still doing well, even this late in the season. They taste delicious and look gorgeous!

What to Expect in This Week's Share

- ❖ Tomatoes or potatoes
- ❖ Cherry tomatoes or sweet potatoes
- ❖ Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, or beets
- ❖ Lettuce or cooking greens
- ❖ Radishes or bok choy
- ❖ Onions or arugula
- ❖ Peppers, kohlrabi, or small green romaine head

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

517-896-6884.

Vegetable Spotlight: Brussels Sprouts

Brussels sprouts, like the name implies, originated in modern day Belgium. Though the time period when they first became cultivated is somewhat unclear, they are generally thought to have been referenced between the 13th and 16th century in some writings. They are very closely related to cabbage, broccoli, kale, and other mustards, and the modern Brussels sprouts were the result of human selection probably during Roman times. In the United States, they came to Louisiana first during the 18th century and were first grown for commercial production in 1920. They became a substantial crop during World War II, mostly in California. Today most Brussels sprouts are grown in the Netherlands, and California produces most of the Brussels sprouts grown in the United States. The vast majority are frozen; only about 15% - 20% are for fresh consumption.

Brussels sprouts are very healthy, being high in Potassium and antioxidants. In fact, it is recommended that those taking blood thinners watch their intake of Brussels sprouts due to the high amounts of potassium interfering with the medication. Brussels sprouts, like others in the Crucifer family, have some strong anticancer properties and also reduce inflammation. There have been links to better heart health as well, and it is generally thought this is due to its anti-inflammatory properties.

Many people have memories of hating Brussels sprouts as children, and usually that is because they were always served boiled. Really any method that overcooks them turns them into



Brussels sprouts take a long time to clean, but they look really nice when they're done.

grayish strong-tasting mush, which doesn't taste very good. Boiling also takes out a lot of the nutrients as well. We usually fry ours with bacon or with garlic and butter. Make sure when frying them to cook them all the way through, so the Brussels are soft throughout but not really mushy.

On our farm, Brussels sprouts are a very long season crop. In fact, out of all of the crops we grow, they take the longest to mature. The seed is started in mid-March and the last harvest of the same plants is usually in late December or early January (9 ½ months). These last harvests are mostly for our own family's use. At the beginning of this long-lived plant's life, we seed the flats and put them in the greenhouse. After about four or five weeks in the greenhouse they are planted in beds in the field. These beds are mulched with black plastic mulch on raised beds. These beds, in addition to our initial fertility mix, are given another dose of chicken pellets because these plants are very heavy feeders. We plant them in two rows with plants spaced two feet apart. As they grow, the plants are kept warm by the black plastic until June, when the canopy of the plant shades out the plastic and temperatures are in an adequate range for fast growth. It is important to push the plants a little because even though they are a cool season crop, they are such a long season crop that here in Michigan, we usually do not get the same yield that growers in California or Washington do because of our shorter season. As the plant grows, we spray Bt (an organic pesticide) every now and then through the summer and spring for cabbage loopers. The Bt is a bacteria that is harmless to people, but infects and kills the worms. In the fall we

spray more Pyganic and Diatomaceous earth to help control the aphids that seem to show up every fall. The aphids are hard to control, and they usually reduce yield and also cause us to spend more time cleaning them before giving them out. Around the first week of September we top the plant by taking off the main growing point, which helps speed the formation of the developing Brussels sprouts. Before harvesting them, we wait until the first frost because this makes them taste sweeter. The longer into the fall and winter we go, the better they taste. We harvest them by stripping the well-shaped Brussels off of each plant. We then cut them down a little to remove any bad leaves, then soak them to make sure there are no aphids hiding inside. They are a lot of work, but they are worth it, because we love eating them!

Recipe: Pan Roasted Brussels Sprouts

Ingredients:

4 strips thick-cut bacon
2 tablespoons butter
1 pound Brussels sprouts, halved
1/2 large onion, chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Cook bacon in a large skillet over medium-high heat until crispy. Remove to a paper towel-lined plate, then roughly chop. In same pan with bacon fat, melt butter over high heat. Add onions and Brussels Sprouts and cook, stirring occasionally, until sprouts are golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, to taste, and toss bacon back into pan. Serve immediately.