

Schreiber & Sons CSA

It's a Culinary Adventure

Schreiberandsons.com

July 6, 2009

Week X

In this week's box,

- Salad- green lettuce, red lettuce, escarole, radicchio, & mizuna
- Beets
- Squash medley
- Cucumbers
- Cherries
- Onions, green
- Potatoes, red
- Eggplant, Japanese
- Kale or Swiss chard
- Chinese cabbage
- Bibb lettuce - for medium and large share members
- Broccoli
- Basil
- Romaine lettuce for organic members, head lettuce for conventional members
- Chinese Cabbage

This is the kind of week that makes up for the first few weeks with the box contents seemed meager. When you see something like "squash medley" that means we have a lot of different kinds of squash and so we send you a mixtures of different kinds. In general the flat round, sometimes ruffled squash are called patty pan or scalloped summer squash. If you get a striped or ridged squash that is green, those are heirloom Italian summer squashes. If you get a slightly tear dropped shaped squash that is light green and speckled, that is a Mexican style squash. The dark solid green and the yellow solid squashes are green and yellow zucchini.

The potatoes is a red variety called Red Pontiac-or at least that is what we are harvesting today. I suspect that we will have to switch varieties later in the week.

Washington State Diet. We are getting ready to have another meeting for those interested in the Washington State Diet. If you are interested in participating, let me know a day and time that works best for you. It needs to be between July 11 and July 26th. The focus on the meeting will preserving foods and sourcing foods grown in Washington.

What's coming next. Right now we have squash, lots and lots of squash and cucumbers. We entering the eggplant season. In one to two weeks we will have cantaloupe and peppers. In three weeks, tomatoes, lots and lots of tomatoes.

What's going on at the farm. When it is hot as it was these past few days, it is impossible for us to irrigate everything as much as it needs to. We just try to minimize the degree of moisture stress. Of

course, this is the time a pump breaks and of course it is on a weekend. I have a new employee who used to work for the state. She asked about getting Friday, the July 3 off, since the 4th of July was on a Saturday. I had to laugh.... no, you do not get the 3rd of July off because the 4th is on a Saturday. The plants still need watering, we still have to pick the produce, hoe the weeds.... there is no time off during the summer time. Someone is at the farm 7 days a week. The first people get here at 6 or before and the last people leave around 7, or later. Seven days a week.

We transplanting the last of the pumpkins, squash and gourds. We are ordering the last of the seeds for the fall plantings. The parsnips are in. We are starting cauliflower and broccoli in the greenhouse. Interesting, in a month we will start planting the crops that will overwinter for next year's CSA. It seems crazy but even though we are in week 10 of 28 weeks of produce, we are gearing up to plant for next year. (I stay awake at night worrying about things like leaving the farm knowing the squash are drooping because of drought stress and how many people will be in the CSA next year and how much leeks will they want so I can order the right amount of seed.)

We have about 17 acres of melons this year, much of which is going wholesale. We are building a melon harvest aid that will allow us to pick 8 rows of melon at a time. Tomorrow we have a dry run for a food safety inspection for melon harvest so today we took all of our workers and gave them food safety training. The training has to be in Spanish.

We were supposed to have our cold room built but when the cooling system people were putting the final touches on the cooler they found that the manufacturer did not ship one little piece that is required to make the whole thing work--so one more week until the most important piece of the whole cooler arrives from some very far and distance locale. Very frustrating. However by the end of the week, I have been assured that our cold room will running.

Quality and Size. We have about 450 members in the CSA-I am not sure why but it is hard for me to tell people this number. I am not sure if I am worried that people will think we are too big. I had someone ask me last week if being this size means we are growing too fast. I am not sure if I am worried that people will think we are being too successful. Two people have dropped out of the CSA and about six more are threatening to do so. The reasons for the displeasure are two fold; small share members concerned with small portion size and quality of the produce. I would like to address these two concerns- incidentally, the same two concerns we have each year and which occur at the same time each.

Portion size. I surveyed our advisory committee last year about portion size. The small share members get half as much as the medium share members which get half as much as the large sized share members. Everybody should be okay with this. The problem is that how do you reduce the volume of produce, do you provide them with less diversity of produce or do you decrease portion size. If we reduce the diversity and keep portion size up, small share members feel they are not getting their fare share and pine for the produce they are not getting. If you keep diversity up and portion size smaller then the portion sizes become too small to be meaningful. Last year I tried to address this by giving the small share members both diversity and larger portion size and it ended up being unfair to the members who paid for a larger share size. In the end I followed advice from the advisory committee of trying to keep diversity high and reducing portion size. This seems to work for most members, but not all of them. I will tell you that balancing portion size and diversity and making sure the right amount is in the small share box is one of the biggest challenges that we have.

Quality. If you are going to have a successful CSA, you better have good quality produce. Nothing will kill your business that have worm holes in your potatoes, internal rot in your cabbage or lettuce and overripe strawberries. I have a friend who told me "Think about Kentucky Fried Chicken, do one thing and do it well." The problem we have is that we are furthest think from KFC that there is. We grow more kinds of crops on the farm than any farm I have ever seen. As my dad would say, we are jack of all trades and the master of none. We are great at doing a lot of different things, but we are not great at anything. One of the issues we have is irrigation. We have a row of crop 1, a row of crop 2, a row of crop 3 and 4 and 5 and 6, all the way to crop 10. These crops are irrigated by two sets of hand lines. Sometimes one crop may need a lot of irrigation, while another does not. Another issue is that we are growing head lettuce which likes a long cool growing season and we tried to grow okra that likes a long

hot season. So last week when you got head lettuce, I took a head home to eat. When my wife cut it open, it was rotten on the inside and we had to toss it in the compost. All I could think of was... I wonder how many people got a head of lettuce like I did.

Another issue we have is that our cold room is taking longer to get finished than we had planned on. Our current little set of cold rooms are maxed out and when we put a lot of produce in them and it is a 100 degrees out side, it is hard to get the field heat out of the produce. I think the wilted leaf greens is probably caused by not getting the field heat out before they go out to you. I am hoping that the new cold room will help with this issue.

Another reason that we sometimes have a challenge with quality is that we growing crops that neither we, nor anyone else around us has grown here before. We are having some real challenges with some of our organic crops. When we ran the organic fertilizer through the drip tape it clogged up the emitters and ruined our drip tape and we lost rows and rows of some crops. Some crops appeared fine but somehow the lack of water caused some quality issues. (The large, well known and experienced distributor we work with did not experience growing crops like Chinese cabbage using drip irrigation with organic fertilizer and no one else does either-when they called their contacts who did (in California) they were using a different kind of fertilizers.) So we are learning, learning, learning and along the way, making a lot of mistakes or figure out new ways to make things happen. Today they delivered a new kind of organic fertilizer that should work through drip.

We need feedback from our clients, particularly when something goes wrong. I deserved the wrap on the knuckles for sending out strawberries in a plastic bag. I needed to know about the cabbage or lettuce with the internal defects. I needed to know about the zucchini that was shriveled because it had not been properly cooled. While complaints are sometimes hard for us to handle, particularly when transmitted in a rather sharp fashion, we need your feedback. We cannot guess what the produce is like when it gets to you.

A different way of looking at this goes like this. If we have 450 customers and we have lost two that is not too bad. I think if we lost 5% that would not be unreasonable-on the other hand, every customer that wants to drop because of portion size, and more importantly, due to quality, it feels like a personal failure to me.

The bottom line is this... if your not happy with something, let us know. Keep the feedback factual, specific and if you want to send pictures in, please do so. We cannot fix a problem we do not know about.

Hopefully with your support and guidance we can improve things.

P.S. I hope you guys like squash, peppers, cucumbers, eggplants, tomatoes and melons because I see lots of produce in our fields with your name on it.

Your Farmer,

Alan Schreiber

Eggplant

Solanum melongena

Eggplant is a semitropical/tropical plant originating in China and India that exists in an astonishing array of shapes and sizes. More than 100 eggplant varieties are available in the

United States. Eggplant is a member of the Solanaceae (tomato) family and is related to tomato, pepper, and Irish potato. Traders from the East brought seed westward to Europe about 1,500 years ago. The name eggplant likely originated from an early form of eggplant that produced white, egg-shaped fruits. Before it gained in culinary popularity, eggplant was also termed mala insana, which translates to mad apple, owing to the belief that eating eggplant would lead to madness.

While there are over a thousand varieties of eggplant, only a handful are familiar to most Americans. Most are familiar with the deep, dark purple oblong or pear-shaped fruit. Eggplant can also be red, white, pink, green, orange, striped and speckled in appearance. The fruit can weigh over 2 pounds or be smaller than a marble in size. It can also take a wide variety of forms including long and slender, globe-shaped, cylindrical, oblong, C-shaped and elongate globular. The covering at the top of the fruit, called the calyx, can be either green or purple.

Choosing the Perfect Eggplant

Look for eggplants that are shiny, plump, firm, and unwrinkled, definitive signs of freshness. The fruit should feel heavy for its size, indicating good moisture content. Another indicator of freshness is the appearance of the stem or calyx. Make sure it is green and bright in color. Press gently with the thumb on the skin of the eggplant. If it is fresh, the skin will spring back quickly.

Older eggplants tend to have a bitter, acidic taste. Eggplants that appear soft, dull in color, and wrinkled are past their prime. If they have scars or bruises on the surface, the flesh may be bruised and discolored inside. To avoid an overly seedy eggplant, select small (1 lb) and medium (1.5 lb) fruits rather than the giant-size (2 lb).

Storage Tips

Eggplant has a shelf life of less than 14 days. Ideally, it should be stored at 46-50°F in 90-95% humidity (in a plastic bag). Do not store eggplant with tomatoes, bananas or watermelon. Do not use ice or chilled water to cool or preserve eggplant as it will cause chill injury, greatly decreasing shelf life.

SIMPLE GRILLED EGGPLANT

Ingredients:

2 1/2 lb Eggplant

1/3 cup Olive oil; virgin

1/4 cup Italian parsley; chopped

Salt to taste

Parsley; finely chopped

Freshly ground black pepper

Preparation:

If using large eggplant, remove the stems, then slice the eggplants horizontally 1/2-inch thick. Small eggplants should be sliced vertically 1/2-inch thick. Place the eggplant slices in a large, heavy plastic bag such as a freezer bag. Add the olive oil, salt and pepper to the bag, close the top and toss the eggplant with the seasonings until the slices are evenly coated. Preheat a grill. Grill the eggplant slices over medium-high heat until tender and attractively browned.

Marinated Baby Eggplant Pizza

Ingredients:

6 baby eggplants (about 8 ounces)

salt

2-4 tablespoons olive oil

4 individual prebaked pizza crusts

1/2 cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese

Marinade:

3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/3 cup red wine vinegar

2 cloves garlic, crushed

large pinch crushed red pepper

salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:

- In a medium bowl, mix together all marinade ingredients. Set aside.

- Thinly slice eggplant lengthwise. Sprinkle both cut sides of eggplant with salt. Allow eggplant to sit on a paper towel for 15 minutes, until paper towel is saturated. If desired, brush eggplant to remove excess salt.

- In a cast-iron skillet, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium-high heat. Cover bottom of pan with eggplant (do not stack) and fry until golden brown, 2-3 minutes per side. Set aside and fry any remaining eggplant. Add more olive oil if needed.
- Add eggplant to marinade. Let it sit for at least 30 minutes.
- Preheat oven to 400. Brush pizza crusts with marinade. Layer eggplant on each crust. Brush with more marinade and top with cheese. Bake for 10 minutes until eggplant is hot and cheese is melted.

Summer Squash

Botanical name: *Cucurbita pepo*

Summer squash are a subset of squashes that are harvested when immature (while the rind is still tender and edible). The name "summer squash" refers to the inability to store these squashes for long periods of time.

The delicate flavor, soft shell and creamy white flesh of summer squash is a perfect addition to any summer meal. Once only available in the summer, they are now available throughout the year; however, they are in season between May and July when they are at their best and most readily available.

Summer squash, members of the Cucurbitaceae family and relatives of both the melon and the cucumber, come in many different varieties. They are generally divided into four groups; crookneck, straight neck, scallop and zucchini. While each type varies in shape, color, size and flavor, they all share some common characteristics. The entire vegetable, including its flesh, seeds and skin, is edible. In addition, some varieties of the squash plant produce edible flowers.

History

Modern day squash developed from the wild squash that originated in an area between Guatemala and Mexico. While squash has been consumed for over 10,000 years, they were first cultivated specifically for their seeds since earlier squashes did not contain much flesh and what they did contain was very bitter and unpalatable. As time progressed, squash cultivation spread throughout the Americas, and varieties with a greater quantity of sweeter-tasting flesh were developed. Christopher Columbus brought squash back to Europe from the New World, and like other native American foods, their cultivation was introduced throughout the world by Portuguese and Spanish explorers. Today, the largest commercial producers of squash include China, Japan, Romania, Turkey, Italy, Egypt, and Argentina.

Nutritional Value: Summer squash contain few calories and no sodium or fat. They are a source of vitamins A and C.

Selection and Storage: When purchasing summer squash, look for ones that are heavy for their size and have shiny, unblemished rinds. Additionally, the rinds should not be very hard since this indicates that the squash are overmature and will have hard seeds and stringy flesh. Purchase

summer squash that are of average size since those that are overly large may be fibrous, while those that are overly small may be inferior in flavor.

Summer squash is very fragile and should be handled with care as small punctures will lead to decay. It should be stored unwashed in a plastic bag in the refrigerator, where it will keep for about seven days. While it can be frozen, this will make the flesh much softer. To do so, blanch slices of summer squash for two minutes before freezing. .

Preparation: Wash summer squash under cool running water and then cut off both ends. You can then proceed to cut it into the desired size and shape for the particular recipe.

Unlike winter squash, summer squash can be eaten rind, seeds, and all. The different varieties vary in size, shape, and color, but they can be used interchangeably in recipes. Select summer squash that's small and firm.

Schreiber & Sons Farm grows 10 different kinds of summer squash.