



# one potato two

News from the Fields of Driftless Organics

Volume 2, Issue 4 - July 3 - 5, 2008

*Week #4. The fun never ceases. Getting our 1 acre of fall cabbage in marks the end of the large transplanting procedures and now we can focus more on getting our fields cleaned of the weeds. We got some much needed rain, combined with some hot sunny days (absolutely perfect vegetable growing weather) and our crops are really growing well. Its a good time to be a vegetable farmer. We are appreciating this window while it is here (ya never know what the wind may blow in...)*

## Fertility 101

(and i'm not talking about babies!)

**S**o, I am going to try to make this as interesting as possible, as I am aware that even though stuff about soil fertility and the like is pretty cool to *me*, it isn't so for everybody. So please bear with me as I talk about soil health and fertility. After all, this stuff's important because healthy food can't exist without healthy soil! Let me tell you a sad tale of the loss of a beloved vegetable of ours, broccoli. It was our second planting of broccoli and it started out well enough. We put it in the ground in time and the wee seedlings looked pretty darn good through most of May. It was towards the end of May we realized that this particular crop just wasn't growing very well. It seemed stunted somehow, with yellow leaves and thin stems. Then, as it started to head out, producing tiny heads that we knew wouldn't amount to anything, we realized we had a genuine crop failure on our hands. The problem, you see, lay in the soil below.

The fact of the matter is, veggies need food and they just will not grow very well in poor soil. Simple enough, right? Well the tough part comes when you try to figure out an economical and sustainable way to make soil fertile enough to grow vegetables. The truth is, poor soil that is full of clay and drains poorly just can't be transformed unless you have a ton of money and time. But a farmer can transform marginal soil by feeding it nutrients.

We feed our soils in a number of different ways. Number one method: composted manure. Throughout the off-season, we acquire dairy cow manure from a couple local farms. We then compost this, according to organic specifications, for a minimum of 120 days (which heats that manure up and kills the pathogens). In the fall, we then apply this to our fields.

Let's talk a minute about poop. With all the news about E Coli and Salmonella, there's been some questions about the use of manure on ground that will eventually have vegetables planted into it. Let me just reiterate, unlike the conventional guys, we follow strict guidelines on manure composting and application time lines. We feel, that by following the rules put in place by the National Organic Program, we are being as safe as can be.

In some cases, for heavy feeding crops, we will apply an organically approved granular fertilizer we buy from a company in Canon Falls, MN. We think this stuff is pure gold. Its made up of primarily composted turkey manure and has been balanced to meet the specific needs of certain crops. Pure gold, I tell ya, pure gold!

Lastly, we try to incorporate cover crops into our planting schedules. These "green manures" like oats, peas, buckwheat, vetch and even rye are planted after a vegetable crop has been

## the box!

Basil  
Garlic Scapes  
Red or White Scallions  
Collard Greens  
Fennel  
Lettuce  
Parsley  
Snap or Snow Peas  
Strawberries



A spindly little broccoli plant with a head of minute proportions.

harvested, and then tilled in to the soil to add fertility and organic matter.

This is the long and short of it, I guess. There are obviously other ways of adding fertility, but these are the three primary methods that work well for us and fall into the local and sustainable regime that we try to follow with all of our farming practices.

So what happened to that sad little broccoli? Well that field in particular was a recently acquired field that we just put into organic production last year. Abused for years by conventional corn and bean growers no doubt, it will take some time to get it "up to snuff". We simply didn't realize how bad it really was. The good news: it's out of the flood plain! See you all next week...

**HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY, EVERYBODY!!**

## YOUR BOX!

**Basil** - sorry for such a small amount, the first basil planting got flooded and this second planting is just starting - but better a little than none, eh? This amount of basil is perfect for the Thai basil stir fry (even though you're getting green or red basil, not the Thai variety) or to garnish some pasta with. The prettiest way to garnish with basil is to remove the leaves, make a stack of 4 or 5 of them, roll the stack up like a cigar, and slice into thin slivers for pretty little curls. Much more basil is on its way!

**Fennel** is such a tasty and under used vegetable! The entire plant is edible - the bulb & stems are crunchy like celery, the leaves are used as an herb, & the whole thing has a mild anise flavor. It will keep in a plastic bag in the fridge for several days. Fennel bulbs/stems are super tasty sliced on salads, sauteed & then simmered in chunky pasta sauces, cooked in minestrone or potato soup, or

roasted or braised as a vegetable in its own right. I often add it to stir-fries when you would normally add celery. Try it in the Thai basil stir-fry recipe...

**Garlic Scapes** - this is the last box for scapes, then we're on to fresh garlic! Discard the pointy tip past the flower bud - the rest is edible! Chop and use the stem/bud anywhere you'd use regular garlic. Makes great pesto (check out the recipe from last week - <http://www.driftles-sorganics.com/062608.pdf>)

**Collard Greens** are a flat-leafed member of the brassica family, prized especially in the South, where they're traditionally slow cooked with other leafy greens (like turnip & mustard) and ham hocks until gooey. To preserve their boun-

tiful nutrients, I prefer to lightly steam or saute them. Cook them as you would other dark leafy greens like spinach or kale - by themselves, in omelettes, pastas, stir-fries, fajitas, etc.

**Lettuce**, green leaf, red bibb, or iceberg. If you get the iceberg, don't stick up your nose - fresh local iceberg is nothing like what you get on a crappy salad bar - it's a crunchy, sweet salad treat.

**Parsley**, of the Italian flat leafed variety. Far tastier than curly parsley. Chop it up & top just about anything with it. Much better fresh than cooked.

**Purple or Yellow Scallions**, both are tasty but the reds are extra lovely featured as a garnish.

**Strawberries** - these are the last of the season, so savor them!

**Sugar Snap or Snow Peas** both can be cooked, although snaps are better raw. Both are great in stir fries or blanched and added to pasta salads.

## THAI BASIL STIR FRY

### Sauce:

- 1/2 c. vegetable or chicken stock
- 2 Tbsp. soy sauce/tamari
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1 - 3 tsp. hot sauce/chili paste or dried red chilies to taste
- 1 - 2 Tbsp. fish sauce, to taste (optional but highly recommended)
  
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. safflower, peanut, or sesame oil
  
- 4 - 5 garlic scapes or 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 bunch scallions, whites chopped & greens sliced (for garnish)
- 1 fennel bulb (core removed), cut into 1/2" slices
- 1 c. snow or snap peas
- 1 bunch collards (stems removed), coarsely chopped
  
- 10-20 basil leaves, thinly sliced

In small bowl, whisk sauce ingredients until sugar is dissolved. In wok or large frying pan, heat oil. On high heat, stir fry garlic scapes, scallion whites, and fennel for about 20 seconds, until fragrant. Add vegetables and stir fry for 1-2 minutes. Add sauce & continue to stir for another 2 minutes, until vegetable are cooked but still slightly crunchy. Add green onion tops & basil & serve.

HEY EVERYBODY! A fellow CSA member has started a blog, chronicling their experiences with their box. It is amazing and definately worth a peek... Check it out!!! <http://www.csate.blogspot.com/>