



ONE POTATO TWO

NEWS FROM THE FIELDS OF DRIFTLESS ORGANICS

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Week FIVE! There's hot and then there was last week, when on Friday I did truly believe that that burning ball of hell we call the sun was going to explode and reign showers of fire upon our lettuce and broccoli fields and ultimately, us. But alas, we survived and we are now into the first week of July! It is about this time when things go into hyperdrive with harvest, harvest and more harvest. We love it!

Farmer Noah is here this week to talk a bit about one of the many things he loves about farming. To learn even more about Noah, check out last year's Sept. 16th newsletter (find it online!)...

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POTATO HARVESTERS AT DRIFTLESS ORGANICS

By Noah Engel

From an early age, I have always been fascinated with agricultural machines and as I have grown older this love as grown with me. This is one of many aspects that draws me to agriculture. I can remember back to when I was about six years old and spent my free time pretending I was a tractor. I would run around the farm barefoot holding a stick out in front of me between both hands, simulating the front end of a tractor. As I ran I would try to make incremental increases in my speed to match the shifting of the real tractors around me. I knew for certain that I wanted to drive a tractor ASAP.

At about age eight I took the first step towards this dream when I was allowed to drive the riding lawn mower. It seemed I found an excuse to drive it just about every day. At age ten I graduated to a small tractor and was allowed to go out and rake hay. By this time my brother and I were in our second season of growing potatoes and with over a half acre in production, it was time for us to hang up our potato forks and look into some mechanization. Not growing up in a potato-growing region I had never seen a potato digger before but I knew they must exist somewhere. The solution ended up being a rust colored piece of iron engineered in the 1800s. Ours was built in the 20s

and was designed to be pulled by horses. It was an old International Harvester one-row potato digger. We pulled it with our small International Harvester Farmall 140 tractor. It didn't work perfectly, but I was nonetheless enamored. We used this machine for a few more years and then moved into the 1950s.

The next improvement was a John Deere model 30 two-row potato digger. It was faster and more effective but built a little light for our heavy, ridge soil. This digger would lift the potatoes out of the ground, let the soil fall through, and then dump them back on top

THIS WEEK'S BOX

- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Fennel
- Fresh Garlic
- Green Beans
- Green Leaf Lettuce
- Lacinato Kale
- Mint
- Red Cabbage
- Red and White Scallions
- Snap Peas
- Snow Peas



When most 16 years olds were buying their first car, Noah was purchasing this...

of the soil for us to pick up. Since we were expected to do chores before and after school we were usually feeling for those potatoes in the dark or, when push came to shove, as the first snowflakes fell.

By this time I was thinking, "There has just got to be some machine that lifts the potatoes out of the ground and sets them into a wagon for me." While I knew that somewhere these machines existed, I didn't think we could ever afford one. Well, the next year we bought one and I'm pretty sure I was the only kid at North Crawford High School who had one (except my brother, of course). This machine brought us into the 1960's at least. Still not exactly modern, it was great fun to use. What it was supposed to do was pull potatoes out of the ground, sift the soil out, bring them up a series of elevators to one long unloading elevator that cantilevered about sixteen ft. off to one side of

the machine, and gently place your potatoes in a storage container. This was a Rube Goldberg contraption that was definitely built too close to the iron range and weighed in at over 15,000 lbs! I will never forget how my brother Josh went and pulled it all 175 miles home with his 1971 K5 Chevy Blazer, the bumper nearly scraping the road. This harvester would have worked great in sandy soil, which is where potatoes are usually grown, but in our heavy clay soil we seemed to be collecting more dirt clumps than potatoes. Since then we have tried two other harvesters with some success but ultimately we have determined that in our heavy soil picking up by hand will have to suffice for now. This doesn't mean that I have stopped dreaming about that day when we will get a machine that picks up the potatoes and deposits them, clay clod free, into storage bins. And that is the history of potato diggers at Driftless Organics.

Broccoli - An extra large broccoli harvest means an extra large portion of America's favorite green vegetable for you! If you just can't eat it all, you can freeze some: bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, drop in the size broccoli chunks (florets & peeled stem) you want (just make sure they're all the same size) & blanch for 3 - 4 minutes, depending on size of chunks. You're looking for bright green color & crisp-tender texture, not mush. Remove from water & immediately drop in a bowl of ice water. After a few minutes drain them, then freeze in freezer bags (you can freeze them loose on a sheet pan first if you don't want them to stick together after they freeze). Use this same method for snap/snow peas (1 minute), green beans (3 minutes), cauliflower (same as broccoli), carrots (3-4 minutes), kohlrabi (3-4 minutes), etc. They're great for pulling out of the freezer to quickly add veggies to stir-fries, pasta, soups, casseroles, etc. Or skip freezing them & try grilling them! Cut broccoli into 1/4" thick wedges starting at the stem & carefully working up lengthwise up through the head. Brush with some oil & salt & pepper & whatever other herbs/spices you want & grill over a medium-hot flame for a couple minutes on each side, until starting to blacken. SO GOOD.

Cauliflower - toss it in a stir-fry or curry or for a fantastic Japanese meal, try the Tempura Vegetables recipe in our web site recipe database, with fennel, cauliflower or cabbage, scallions, & peas with some miso soup or sushi! Try it - you will like it! Store in the crisper drawer of your fridge for a week to 10 days.

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.

Fresh Garlic - is fresh out of the ground and uncured, meaning it won't store like cured garlic will (fresh garlic will be laid out in the greenhouse with fans going for several weeks to cure and be ready to store). It's really easy to peel. Use it like cured garlic, just use a little extra since it has a higher moisture content.

Green Beans - These beans are so fresh and tasty, they are best eaten raw. This is just the beginning of them... much more to come!

Green Leaf Lettuce - Even though we wash the leaf lettuce well, it may be hiding bits of sand or soil, so please wash it again! Salad spinners work wonders. Stores best in plastic with a paper towel so it's not sitting in water.

Lacinato Kale - the tastiest of kales, it is an heirloom variety from Italy. To preserve the bountiful nutrients, don't overcook the kale! Strip or cut the stems from the leaves, wash, & chop. You can steam - or braise the wet leaves without oil in a hot pan for just a minute or two - until wilted & bright green. Top with olive oil & lemon juice, soy sauce & toasted sesame oil, or Parmesan cheese. Or you can add chopped leaves to just about any dish - pasta, stir-fries, soups - right at the end of its cooking time.

Mint - fresh mint is such a treat. Delicious with lamb, yogurt, fruit salads, lemonade, & as tea. Store in plastic, in your refrigerator.

Purple or White Scallions - The onion substitute until the onions come in, which is very soon. They go great in stir fries, salads or anywhere else you would be using an onion. Store in plastic in the fridge & use up within a week.

Red Spring Cabbage - well, so it's not still spring, but this is indeed an early cabbage. Doesn't keep as long or have quite as deep of color as its fall counterpart the red storage cabbage. If you keep the outer leaves on as protection, it will keep whole in the fridge for weeks. Once you cut into it, though, you should store it in plastic & use it up within a week or two.

Snap Peas - Delicious raw all by themselves or with dip or sliced into salads. A brief dip (30 seconds to a minute) into salted boiling water, then shocked in ice water, though, renders them heavenly. You wouldn't think it would make much of a difference, but it really does. You can then toss them with your favorite vinaigrette & some nuts or cheese & scallions for a really special salad. Or try them hot in the recipe below. Don't forget to peel back the stem and remove the little pea-string that runs along the back edge of the pea.

Snow Peas - are the flatter of the two kinds of peas. These are best in some sort of Asian stir fry. Try to use them up quick as they don't seem to keep as long as the snap peas.

Broccoli and Fennel Salad with Blue Cheese and Walnuts

3 Tbsp. olive oil
2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. dijon mustard
1 Tbsp. shallots or green onions, minced
salt & pepper taste
2 1/2 cups broccoli florets (can substitute cauliflower, green beans or snap peas)
1 small fennel bulb, cored & thinly sliced
1/3 c. walnuts, chopped & toasted
1/3 c. blue cheese, crumbled
fennel leaves, for garnish

Whisk together oil, lemon juice, mustard, onions, salt & pepper in a medium sized serving bowl. Blanch broccoli in boiling salted water for 1-2 minutes, drain, cool in ice water, & drain. Add to dressing with sliced fennel & toss with walnuts & blue cheese. Garnish with fennel leaves. Serve cold or at room temperature. Serves 4.

Sautéed Snap Peas & Mint

1 Tbsp. oil
3 cups snap peas, stems/strings removed
1/4 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. sugar
pepper to taste
2 scallions, white parts only, minced
1 tsp. finely chopped fresh garlic
zest and juice from a quarter of a lemon
2 Tbsp. fresh mint leaves, cut into thin ribbons (aka chiffonade)

In a medium/large skillet, heat oil over medium/hot heat. Add peas, sprinkle with salt, sugar, & pepper & cook without stirring for about 30 seconds. Then stir once & let cook for another 30 seconds without stirring. Then saute while stirring constantly for another minute. Push peas to edges of skillet & add scallions & scapes (& a bit more oil if necessary) & cook for about 30 seconds. Add lemon zest & juice, remove from heat & stir everything together. Serve immediately with mint as garnish.