



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

11 October 2007

Given how tired I feel—I may fall asleep in the middle of a sentence—I will restrict my comments to matters of vital importance: pie and weird roots.

I do not often get to hand out a crop that I have never grown before. We have tried just about every vegetable I can find seed for that will grow in this climate. Occasionally, however, we come up with something different. In most cases, a new crop turns up in one of the catalogs. It is usually another Asian green, some often subtly different version of mustard, of which there appear to be an endless supply.

The dark green bunch of broccoli-like things in your bag is one such crop. It is called Happy Rich and it is a slightly improved version of Suiho, which we grew last year, which was itself a slightly improved version of Green Lance, which we grew the year before that, which is a more uniform hybrid version of Chinese Kale. Though related to the 25 or so other Asian greens we have grown over the years—including the baby bok choy in the bag, a new variety called Bonsai—these versions of Chinese kale were something distinctly new (and tasty) that we were happy to add to the repertoire. I like to think of them as the embodiment of what broccoli raab hopes to be: slightly mustardy yet sweet, with excellent leaf and stem textures and enough heft to retain their form when steamed (and topped with a mixture of soy sauce, sesame oil, vinegar and a little hot pepper). In fact, now that they have shown they will grow reliably in a range of conditions we have stopped planting broccoli raab.

Sometimes, though, the crop has been there in the catalog for a number of years and I have simply decided not to try it for some reason or other. For instance, I could be growing Cardoon, like artichokes a form of edible thistle. It is labor-intensive to grow (you have to wrap the stems in newspaper to blanch them). In and of itself, however this would not have been sufficient to deter me, but then I read a recipe that suggested if you blanch Cardoon a couple of times it won't be quite so unpleasantly bitter. As much as I enjoy growing weird stuff I could not bring myself to expend that kind of effort on a crop that requires so much more effort to be rendered edible.

Having grown tomatillos, I knew husk cherries would not pose any challenges to the farmer (we still have tomatillos coming up where we planted them five years ago). But I feared they, like tomatillos, would pose serious challenges to eaters and so wavered for several years. Obviously, I overcame that concern this year—I can only resist an easy to grow weird vegetable for so long. Fortunately, my concern was unfounded (and my assumption about how easy they are to grow proved correct).

I have had my doubts about the reception salsify would receive too. That, combined with the difficulties associated with growing a slow-germinating, slow-growing root crop that takes four months to mature, caused me to pass up on the chance to offer members something even its fans describe as distinctive, a word that applied to food often comes dangerously close to meaning repellent. Once again, however, I could not bring myself to never try it. And so this spring a seeded half a bed of salsify, prepared at the first sign of serious trouble to till it under and consider that no great loss. Nobody off the farm would

**This week's share: Bok Choi, Eggplant, Garlic, Chinese Kale, Lettuce, Onions,
Parsley root, Peppers, Hot peppers, Potatoes, Salsify, Turnips,
Butternut winter squash, Dill**

know, and even if people found out I doubted I would receive many irate messages about doing in the salsify crop. Somewhat to my surprise, the salsify germinated rather quickly and well, while the weeds did not. And so here it is—it being the beigeish hairy roots in the bag, not to be confused with the whiter ones that look like parsnips. Those are in fact parsley root, which is a bit weird but something I have grown a few times before, though it has never done so well as this. Salsify is sometimes known as oyster plant, but whether or not that describes its flavor I cannot say because I have never, as far as I know, eaten salsify (handing out something I have never eaten happen even more rarely than handing out something I have never grown before). This, I suspect, does not distinguish me from most people. It is not a common vegetable. None of my vegetable cookbooks mention it. Paul Bocuse, however, offers up five recipes, each of which requires about equal parts salsify and butterfat. I can offer the following hints. You have, unsurprisingly, to peel it. Once peeled it should be put straight away into cold water with a little vinegar or lemon juice (otherwise, apparently, it will discolor in a notable fashion). From there you can boil or steam it, roast it or mash it. In other words, treat it much as you might any other weird root vegetable such as parsley root.

You may have though that when I mention weird roots and pie together above it meant you would find both in your bag this week. Alas, there is no pie in the share. But there was plenty of pie on the farm this past Sunday at the Open House and everyone there got their share. Including, of course, Greg and Andrea and me. As the judges of the pie contest we had to try all seven (such are the sacrifices demanded of pie contest judges). Choosing a winner required considerable deliberation, which is as much a testament to the quality of the pies as it is to the firmly held array of opinions on what makes a pie prize-worthy. In the end, Jan Satin's three berry pie triumphed.

I wonder if next year anyone will enter a three weird root pie in the contest.