



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

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Are shallots just small onions? This, surely, ranks high amongst the great, vexing questions that bedevil human existence: Are we here for a reason (and if so is it good enough to justify the trouble we cause)? Can one be inherently good or only carry out good acts? Is it really better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? Does any wine go well with Indian food? What is Cheez Whiz? Where did all the time go? Paper or plastic? Who watches infomercials? Why is there so much ugly furniture? Who'll stop the rain? To be or not to be? What is in a name? Why do cities keep building stadiums for professional sports teams? What's up Doc? Are we there yet? You talkin' to me? Where have all the flowers gone?

Space constraints force me to save the answers to these questions for some other newsletter. I will confine myself to the issue of shallots for today. So are they just small onions? Yes. And no. Or maybe it is the other way around.

If that seems confusing consider the following question. Is a tiger just a big cat? You could certainly defend the affirmative. After all, if a tiger is not a big cat, what is it? True it does not simply look like a magnified house cat. But to say it is a big cat is not to deny that it differs from other, smaller cats, or even other big cats. Tiger is not simply a synonym for big cat. It is a particular kind of big cat, easily identified (preferably from some distance). In which case the answer must be no, a tiger is not just a big cat. Yes, it is a cat and it is indeed big, but to say a tiger is just a big cat is to miss out on what makes a tiger a tiger and not an ocelot or jaguarundi.

Does this mean that a shallot is actually a ten-foot long, ferocious striped onion? Well, no and... no. So what is a shallot? The easiest way to describe it is as a small onion. Not only does it look like one, it also tastes (more or less) like one. If your recipe (or instinct) calls for shallots and you don't have any you can always use onion instead. Of course, you could also substitute shallots for onions if you ran out of onions and happened to have a lot of shallots, but nobody ever bothers to point that out.

Many people, having noticed the obvious similarities between onions and shallots, have wondered why anyone should bother with a shallot. If you can use onions instead and onions are bigger, easier to peel and considerably cheaper then surely you can ignore shallots. They must just be some sort of gourmet affectation, one more form of insidious French culinary snobbery.

You can believe in the pointlessness of shallots and live a perfectly satisfactory life (assuming, anyway, that despite foregoing shallots you use plenty of onion in your food). You can also believe in the pointlessness of travel or novels or ice cream and live a satisfactory life. Well, maybe not ice cream. But it would be fair to say you were missing out on a few things if you skipped travel and novels—such as travel and novels. I don't know that I would claim eating shallots has the same value as seeing new places or reading fiction. But I do know I would claim that a shallot is not just a small onion and that if you have never had one you will, no matter how many onions of any size you eat, have missed out on something—such as travel and novels. No wait, that was the sentence before last. Tigers? Ice cream? Ocelots?

This week's share: Arugula, Beets, Carrots, Celery root, Garlic, Lettuce, Mustard greens, Onions, Russian Banana fingerling potatoes, Shallots, Winter squash, Lemon grass

All right, I give up. But I know you would be missing out on something. It will come back to me. In the meantime, here are some shallots in your bag. They are the things that look like small red onions (as opposed to the thing that looks like a big red onion and is a big red onion).

Do not confuse the shallots with the pale root vegetable, which is celery root. It cannot be used in place of shallots or onions. But it can be shredded (after you peel it) and mixed with sliced shallot and a dressing made of sour cream or (and) mayonnaise, mustard, lemon juice, a dash of paprika, salt and pepper. Or you can dice it and sauté it in butter with shallot, apple and carrot and a little sage until it starts to soften, then add some cider, a little lemon juice and a dash of cream and a cook a few more minutes, then put the mixture into hollowed out apples and bake the stuffed apples until they are soft. Or you can cut it into big chunks and mix it with chunks of carrot, beet, potato and onion and some garlic cloves, toss the vegetables with olive oil, salt and a few sprigs of rosemary and roast them until they are softened and nicely browned.

Unless you can perform miracles on celery root and multiply it you probably won't be able to follow all three of my suggestions. Many people, of course, would only want to follow all three—or even one—if someone could perform a miracle on celery root and make it taste like something else—ice cream, for instance, or ocelot. But for those of you who like celery root and want more from the farm there is some hope. We have a few left. You can add celery root to your list of storage crops you want to buy from the farm to help you through the winter. Like beets, carrots, yellow and red onions, rutabagas and red, white, yellow, fingerling and russet potatoes, it costs \$1/lb. We also have shallots (\$4/lb), Porcelain, Bogatyr and Music garlic (\$7/lb) and tiger. Hang on, I think we are out of tiger. Well, you can always use onions instead. Orders over 50 pounds will get a discount. If you place an order by Monday we can deliver it with your final bag next Thursday (we will enclose a bill). Or you can drive out to the farm some time this fall and pick up your order. It is a lovely drive and I will give a small discount or extra vegetables to people who pick up on the farm. As always, you can also drive out and see the farm and not pick up any vegetables. Plus there are tigers and excellent ice cream nearby. What more could you want?