

Cooke Hollow Farm News - 6 October 2005

This week's share: Arugula, Beet greens, Carrots, Daikon, Eggplant, Garlic, Green lance, Leek, Lettuce, Onions, Peppers, Chippewa potatoes, Turnips, Winter squash, Lemon balm, Parsley

This week's news: the ancient Greeks, who were more systematic about such things, probably had a word for the oratorical device of boasting by complaining. Whatever its proper name, it is much used by farmers, who are both culturally (and often temperamentally) disinclined to state anything too positively and stubbornly proud of their work. Success in farming is hard won. On those rare occasions when something goes particularly well on the farm, you don't want it to pass unremarked. But god forbid you should brag about it. So you find a way to make your success sound like a problem. I was introduced to this by Eddie Lamb our first year here when he assured me that the stupendous size of the corn he had planted in our fields only meant there would be too much and he would get a bad price for it. Often it is done more subtly so that only another farmer will understand. For instance, you might complain that you have a terrible problem with some weed, such as purslane, that anyone in the business knows is too timid to interfere with crops and moreover only thrives where all the nastier weeds have been controlled. To complain about purslane is to let other farmers know that you, at least, have gotten rid of all the thorny invasive weeds that plague them.

I mention all this because you might think I am showing off when I say that we are encountering a rather strange but serious problem this fall: we have too many vegetables. How, you may wonder, can that actually be a problem. Surely abundance is what farmers aim for. And I will admit that as farm problems go, oversupply is not particularly distressing. It beats a hail storm or a month of drought. But having too many vegetables leads to waste—waste not just of the extra crops we have no use for, which is bad enough, but also of the effort to grow them.

This problem is in part our own doing, and in part a result of the abnormally nice weather we have had for the past month or so. We are to blame for planting too much of certain crops, potatoes in particular. Of course, having done that we are getting much higher potato yields than normal, (25 to 50% higher) thus compounding the problem. I am also hard pressed now to explain why I sowed such large blocks of mustard greens and daikon (it is the long white root in your bag, and it is a large radish, which you can eat raw or cube and pickle or shred and make into a salad). Similarly, I do not know why I thought we needed two kinds of Chinese cabbage, though I must say that they are looking good.

But it is not our fault most of the fall greens and roots are maturing at the same time. If we had had the cooler weather I had every reason to expect in September everything would have grown slower and would be holding

a few rows. But given how last fall's carrots did in the same field and in reasonably good weather it was not too many. And given the dry growing season this year there was no reason to think these carrots would size up. Certainly not to this size. Even the yellow and purple carrots have thrived (there are a few yellow carrots that weigh easily a pound). Only the red carrots have been a disappointment. Not only did they grow poorly, they are not particularly red. If you are tiring of eating raw carrots, I recommend you slice some into thin rounds, put them in a wide pan, cover with water, add a tablespoon or two of butter, some brown sugar or maple syrup, salt, pepper and a dash of paprika, and cook them until the water has evaporated and the carrots are lightly caramelized.

Before you begin to feel too sorry for us, I hasten to point out that not every cop has done excessively well. I had hoped for more winter squash, but we could not get the weeds under control (not for lack of effort) and the lack of rain meant the fruit did not size up well. Still, we did better than last year, when the whole crop rotted. And we had quite a harvest crew this year, as those of you who attended that work day (thank you) know. As always, I recommend that you cook your member-harvested winter squash whole (and this goes for winter squash harvested by nonmembers too). Just stick it in a 375 degree oven until it goes soft. It will slice open easily and the flesh will have steamed itself.

Fruit share: Empire and Cortland or Gala apples from O. A. Borden and Sons, Easton.

I thought it would be easy to tell the Empires, which are normally small and have a distinctive spotted skin, from the Cortlands, which are normally large. When I opened the boxes, however, I could not tell them apart (the Galas, with their Delicious shape and paler, yellowish skin are easy to identify). You can, probably tell them apart by taste, though I cannot begin to describe the tastes accurately enough to