

## THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS – 22 June 2006

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We have a lame duck. Well, I say “have” but that is not really accurate. For a start, it is unclear to me under what circumstances outside the dining room one can be said to truly have a duck. It suggests the sort of familiarity one achieves with dogs or pigs (good pigs) or, from time to time, cats. But ducks, at least not the two I know, show no interest in making friends. I suppose you could also have ducks like you have fleas, which is somewhat closer to the truth. Liz, at least, came to regard them more or less as an infestation after they spent much of the winter on our porch eating dog food. Suffice it to say that ducks have much to learn in the area of personal hygiene. Despite the scant snowfall, we spent a lot of time shoveling off our porch this winter.

Of course, you might also say that you have ducks because, whatever your relationship with them, you simply happen to own them. But we don’t own the two ducks that live on our farm. Our neighbor, DJ, bought them from the Wolffs when the Wolffs decided that a flock of exotic ducks posed a health risk to their dairy herd. DJ bought them and maintained possession of them for the entire time it took to drive them back to his place, about five minutes. At which point they hopped out of the truck, thanked him for the lift and flew to our house. I guess they had heard about the dog food.

For the most part we refer to them only as the ducks, as in “Will, could you please chase the ducks off the porch again.” But we have given them proper names: Terry and Al. Short for Terrine and A l’orange. Terry and Al are male Muscovy ducks. For those unfamiliar with the basic domesticated duck breeds of North America (to learn more send for our User’s Guide for the 2006 CSA Duck), Muscovy ducks are big—we thought they were geese when they turned up—and ugly. They have bald, warty, bright red heads topped with a sort of tough guy buzz cut of swept back short feathers. I do not know if they lack the ability to quack, but in any event they never do. Instead, they make a primeval hissing noise if you get too close to them.

Most of our animals seem to enjoy spending time with other creatures. The white hen sometimes sits with our dogs, often dines with Mickey Boy, our big pig, and every night sleeps on the fence by the little pigs, 14 and 15. Franklin, our male donkey, is fond of dogs. One of our cats, Screamin Jay Pawkins, is so sociable he tried to follow the neighbors home the other night. Sometimes Mickey Boy pushes through his fence—at 800 or so muscular pounds he is a sort of porcine bulldozer—to go grunt at 14 and 15. But Terry and Al keep to themselves and, except for some ritualistic combat this spring, they get along. Well, I don’t know that for certain. They may scorn one another. But they could easily have parted ways long ago, and yet here they still are, wandering—or in the case of Terry, limping—around our farm.

They could easily have parted ways because Muscovy ducks are—for domesticated ducks, anyway—notably good fliers, a fact nobody seems to have mentioned to DJ before he let them out of his truck. Terry and Al don’t fly as often as I would if I walked like a duck. But they certainly can and sometimes, for no obvious reason, they launch themselves and circle the farm several times fast and low (one of them nearly flew into my head this spring).

Coming attractions: kohlrabi, lemon basil, the meaning of life

## **This week's share: Garlic scapes, Lettuce, Mustard greens, Radishes, Scallions, Hakurei turnips, Basil, Cilantro**

But if flying is one of their talents, landing is not. It is not their fault. They are simply not built for landing. Or, more precisely, not bred for it. Muscovy ducks are a man made product. Not that wild ducks land notably adroitly either. But at least they weigh half as much, and they are far less likely to try landing in our yard (though no doubt if they knew about dog food they would).

Obviously the characteristics of a Muscovy benefit people (aside from their size they are reputed to be good egg layers). In some ways they benefit the ducks too. Terry and Al, the natural timidity of ducks bred out of them, are able to live near us, feasting on scraps around the farm, finding shelter in our barns and on our porch, and getting some protection from predators thanks to our dogs. Given the normal life of wild ducks—they always seem nervous, and probably with good reason—the occasional crash landing (well that and the chance that someone will opt to roast you for dinner) seems in some ways like a small price to pay. It seems that way, in any event, until you have seen a lame duck trying to walk. Fortunately, Terry's leg is getting better. It would have been a hell of a time teaching him to use crutches.

The Muscovy duck may not be an unbridled triumph of human interference, but it is possible hard neck garlic is. It is relatively easy to grow. You plant it in the fall, when you have time, and you can save your own seed stock. It will produce even if you don't weed it very well. It stores for months. It tastes good. And it produces three different crops. Last week you had green garlic shoots. This week you have the scapes, which as many of you know are the flower stalks (whether or not it actually produces a flower is a question for the botanists among you). We have to pick them so that the plants can concentrate on making large bulbs. But we would pick them anyway. Not only can you have hours of fun making chains out them, but you can also make a very good sauce by pureeing them in a blender with olive oil. You could also add herbs (basil or cilantro, for instance), lemon juice or vinegar, a little white wine, a touch of hot pepper or some nuts (to make garlic scape pesto). It is good on meat, fish, vegetables, noodles and duck. And if you don't eat it all you can freeze the leftovers (or feed them to a pig).

We were recently served a salad of mustard greens in a rice paper wrapper tube with a slightly sweet dipping sauce. It wasn't bad and it was one of the funnier salads I have had. If you are not feeling sufficiently inspired to try that you could just toss some mustard greens into a lettuce salad with a normal dressing. Or you could sauté them (and the turnip greens and some small pieces of garlic scape) quickly and mix them with some rice noodles and soy sauce.

You do not want to sauté the turnips too quickly. The trick is to cook them so they are tender and nicely browned. I suggest cutting them into bite sized chunks and cooking them over a medium low flame (if you have an electric cook top I cannot help other than to tell you to get a gas stove) in a mixture of butter and oil with a good dose of salt, stirring them around every few minutes so they get browned on all sides. Sautéed turnips go well with roast duck. And I know a lame one who would be easy to catch. Or you can put some dog food on your porch and hope that the next time DJ lets some ducks go one of them finds its way to you.

**Fruit share:** Strawberries from John Hand, Hand Melon Farm, Easton, NY.