

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 23 June 2005

This may well be the first CSA newsletter ever written about toilet paper. At the very least, I can assure you it is the first newsletter I have ever written on the topic. And why, you are probably wondering, start now? Well, there isn't any particular reason, but then I don't really have to have a reason. All I have to do is fill up the page. If you don't want to read about toilet paper, you can turn it over. I am pretty sure I don't mention toilet paper on the other side.

I guess I should warn the few of you still reading that you won't be getting any consumer ratings from me. No doubt, there are better toilet papers and worse toilet papers, but I will leave it to others to make those important distinctions. Nor do I have any useful household hints about toilet paper, such as how to use it to fix a leaky faucet or decorate your Thanksgiving table. In fact, all I have is a question: why is toilet paper white?

I understand why writing paper is white, though given the fact that most words these days are printed it does not in general have to be so white. Newsprint, for instance, is a noticeably murky white—one might even call it gray—and yet newspapers are perfectly legible. Not that many Americans bother to read a newspaper any longer, but I am pretty sure the decline in readership has rather more to do with people having lost the inclination to be saddled with facts than with any revolt against the less than brilliant whiteness of the paper itself.

But people don't often write on toilet paper, and for good reason. Pencils rip through it and ink just spreads. Obviously, the people who make toilet paper don't expect it to be used as writing paper. And yet, they go to some effort to make it white.

Not that I am worrying about toilet paper manufacturers' efforts. What concerns me is the environmental cost of their effort. Trees, as you may have noticed, are not white. Turning a tree colored tree into white paper involves a fairly toxic process. And, strangely enough, some of those toxins find their way out of the paper plants and into water and soil. There's a good reason you don't want to live downstream from a paper plant, and a good reason you cannot use composted paper sludge on vegetable fields (they use it to cap landfills). What there isn't a good reason for is white toilet paper.

I am not, let me be clear, advocating that we switch to using twigs and leaves. Comfort is a legitimate issue. But the color of toilet paper has nothing to do with its efficacy. I understand that white for us means pure and healthy and clean, and that using white toilet paper makes people feel more comfortable about what they are actually doing with the toilet paper. But, given the cost, that is the kind of symbolic comfort we can do without.

Worrying about white toilet paper might seem silly given the serious environmental issues we face—such as the fact that the current

administration, driven by greed, political thuggishness, and religious fanaticism, appears to actually relish destroying the world. It might seem silly, too, given that the chlorine used to bleach paper is only one element—and not the worst—in a heady brew of heavy metals, PCBs, dioxin and other tasty treats created in the course of paper manufacturing. It is not as though switching to unbleached toilet paper will clean up the planet.

But it seems to me we are unlikely to get very far in our fitful attempts to act as if this is the only planet we are likely to inhabit until we learn to regard the ordinary aspects of our lives rather more critically. The moment for serious sacrifice may come. In the meantime there are plenty of simple things we can do (or do without) to tread a little lighter if we only pay attention and bother to ask such seemingly frivolous questions as why is toilet paper white.

This week's share: Beet greens, Bok choy or Napa cabbage, Garlic scapes, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Radishes, Green shallots, Cilantro, Dill

This week's news: I guess we haven't run out of vegetables yet. Well, not weird ones, anyway.

I wish I could figure out why some crops prosper in one year or one field and fail another. Well, sometimes it is obvious. Several years ago our lettuce crop was terrible the second half of the year, but then the field was under water most of that time. Four years ago the outside tomatoes bore hardly any fruit after they disappeared into the weeds. Last year, after a promising start (in spite of hail), the kale succumbed to disease and an ineradicable aphid infestation. This year, however (so far), the kale is flourishing. I don't know that any of you consider this good news, but for those of us who have done the work of planting and weeding and picking it, this counts as a pleasant surprise. Actually, those of you who feel leery of kale may find it is a pleasant surprise. For a start, it does not have to be cooked all day. You can slice it into fine strips and cook it in a hot pan in a few minutes. It is packed with nutrients. And it tastes good.

The kohlrabi has also done well this year, which may cause even more consternation than the kale. I have heard that people don't know what to do with it. But it's very simple. Peel the kohlrabi, cut it into thin slices and eat it (if you want to get fancy, sprinkle it with salt and dip it in sour cream—which works well with radishes too).

I cannot compare this year's crop of green shallots to another because I have never pulled shallots at this stage before. But Jacob assured me they would be good and Jacob doesn't lie about vegetables (he is also a big fan of kale). You can use them as you would scallions or shallots. They are particularly tasty with eggs, but they go well in lots of other dishes too. I put some in a salad dressing last night and I didn't hear any complaints.

Garlic scapes are both good news and good to eat. They are good news because they foretell the garlic crop, which is looking quite promising right now, though some of the beds could use weeding again (I would be happy to show you which ones). In the meantime, you can get a pretty healthy dose of garlic flavor from the scapes (which are the flower stalks of hard neck garlic—and I have no idea why they grow in circles). By the time we have finished picking them we are enveloped in the smell of garlic. It is not so bad. There are worse smells on the farm (I would be happy to show you which ones). If you are desperate for garlic you can just start gnawing on the scapes. But I would recommend you puree them with olive oil and stir the resulting pesto-like substance into things or just use it as sauce. It would be tasty on beef (just ask Jacob).

We are going to make it easier for you to test that claim. Starting next month, ~~we will be delivering meat produced on local farms.~~ The enclosed sheets offer information about the farms and about how to log onto the web site to order meat. Anything you order will be packed frozen and delivered to your pick up site along with the vegetables.

Speaking of deliveries, the response to switching to a later delivery time has been almost unanimously positive. Therefore we will make this change starting on July 7. I will tell you as precisely as I can when the truck should get to each site in next week's newsletter, but as a general principle, it will get to your site about 2 ½ hours later than it does now. We hope that this will mean you are getting even fresher vegetables and will not cause any problems. But if it does, please let me know.

Fruit share (for those who purchased a fruit share): strawberries from
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