

## THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - July 28, 2005

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Last Saturday we had a birthday party for Sam and Will. There were games and goodie bags and lots of lemonade and there was present opening and marshmallow roasting. And all I had to do, because Liz is kind and more organized and doesn't share my belief that goodie bags are an abomination, was make the food and the fire and cut up the ice cream cakes. So I made a lot of salads—there are a certain number of vegetables around the place—and created an instant bonfire with a bale of hay, dry wood scraps from our packing shed project and a healthy dose of gasoline and I brought out the ice cream cakes—strawberry/blueberry for Will and maple walnut for Sam—and stuck the appropriate number of candles in each. And it was only as I prepared to light the candles while the guests gathered round the table to sing and get their cake (but mostly to get their cake) that I noticed I had put seven candles on Sam's. Which would have been fine except that Sam just turned nine.

I do of course know how old my son is. I can without much prompting recall what year he was born and what grade he is in. I have been around for all nine birthdays (plus the birth day), cutting ice cream cakes at most of them (not, sadly, the birth day) and frowning at the goodie bags. And it is not hard to imagine Sam is nine if you meet him. He's nearly five feet tall and a hundred pounds. He reads all the time—the other morning he got distracted by an open book in the middle of tying his shoe laces and recently I found him sitting at the kitchen table reading an article about the death penalty in *The New York Review of Books*—so his vocabulary is anything but childish. He takes eating seriously. As I once noted in a newsletter, he was the only two year old in modern American history to utter the sentence "I like turnips." While discussing cheese with my mother last month, he admitted that he is not as fond of the blues. At the birthday party, while most of the other kids attempted to avoid the salads, Sam was loading his plate with every vegetable he could find. He has, too, a somewhat contemplative demeanor that makes him seem almost grown up—at least until he puts on the special army uniform he has concocted from odd pieces of clothing and torn fabric and marches around the front lawn as unselfconsciously as only a child dressed like that can.

I know all this and still I put only seven candles on his cake. Seven seemed like enough. Surely nine years would not go by that quickly.

But it does, and we would do well to take note. For a start, it helps when you are trying to put the right number of candles on a birthday cake. It might also help us take more seriously the warnings about the affects we are having on this planet's climate. That the average temperature might rise a matter of degrees in a century hardly sounds like cause for panic—or even action, at least in this country. 2105, we tell ourselves, is a long way off. There's plenty of time for someone else to deal with the heat. A hundred years.

Seeing how fast Sam's nine years have slipped by me, a hundred suddenly doesn't sound like so many any more. It seems to me we had better start planning now for those birthday parties a century off and do what we can to make sure kids then have as pleasant a day as Sam and Will did.

**This week's share: Beets, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Lettuce, Mustard greens, Pearl onions, Pepper, Hot peppers, Potatoes, Squash, Basil (Genovese, Purple, Thai and Lemon)**

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**This week's news:** Apparently, some of our crops just noticed that it is summer. What they thought was going on these past eight weeks I cannot say. I know a fair amount about how they grow, where they like to live, their nutritional requirements. But as for what is on a vegetables mind at any given moment, I have no clue, though I suspect they are capable or irony and know too well their contrarian tendencies. Such as choosing to grow slowly despite entirely adequate amounts of heat and water and fertilizer, conditions that have proved nearly ideal for all other plants (all other plants, naturally, being weeds).

Actually, one of the vegetables in your bag did choose to grow surprising large: the pearl onions. I am not complaining, but I am puzzled. I thought there was a limit to how big they could get--that limit being considerably smaller than many of these. There have been years when I would have been happy to get storage onions as big as some of these pearl onions grew. And they did this despite growing amidst a fair number of weeds, a thing that onions normally dislike intensely. Now that we have pulled them out of the weeds you can use them as you would other onions or as you would pearl onions. They are fairly dense, so they will not cook down in quite the way a large onion would, but they were designed to hold together when boiled so that makes sense. You could stick them on a skewer with some eggplant and squash and pepper and grill the lot. Then you could eat the vegetables hot or pour some vinaigrette on them and let them sit for a day and have a nice cold grilled vegetable salad with some chopped mixed basil on top.

Or you could separate your basil (the Genovese is the standard, green-leaf one, the purple is purple, the Thai has purple flowers and purplish stems and you just have to sniff them to figure out which the lemon is) and find just the right use for each. You will find that the purple tastes more or less like the Genovese. Well, more or less but less. That is to say, it is somewhat less pungent. The Thai would go well in Thai food (surprise, surprise). You could make a salad with the cucumbers, onion, hot pepper and Thai basil and dress it with lime juice, a dash of fish sauce and a little sugar (some thinly sliced cold grilled beef would be good on it too).

As for the hot peppers, the small one is a Serrano, and potentially hot. The other might be a Jalapeno (like a fat Serrano, but a little darker green), Andy (long, thin and red), Cherry Bomb (roundish and red), Alma Paprika (pale yellow and round) or Paper Lantern (green and somewhat lantern shaped. They can all be quite hot, and they tend to be somewhat hotter in hot years. But they make you sweat, which cools you down. And they make your body release endorphins, which make you feel good. And they are tasty.

If you are having trouble identifying hot peppers or basil then you should come out to the farm this Saturday and I will be glad to help you.

**Fruit share: blueberries grown by Ken Denberg, Natural Selection Farm, Cambridge, NY and red currants from The Alleged Farm.**