

Holcomb Farm CSA Newsletter

September 25, 2006

This Week's Crops

Sweet Potato Greens
Turnips
Arugula
Summer Squash
Green Peppers
Tomatoes
Winter Squash
Cabbage
Broccoli
Tatsoi
Pac Choi
Beets

Pick Your Own Crops

Cherry Tomatoes
Raspberries
Perennial Herbs
Green Beans

Sweet Potatoes, Tubers and Greens

I often get raised eyebrows when I tell people that we grow sweet potatoes here in Connecticut. After four seasons of attempting to grow them in Connecticut, I can see why this state is not known as the sweet potato capital.

Sweet potatoes are propagated vegetatively from bits of the previous years tubers. They are grown out in a greenhouse then transplanted to the field. We purchase these slips from nurseries in the South, a far more fitting environment for these heat loving, slow growing plants. We get the fast growing variety we can in hopes that we can get decent sized tubers in our shorter frost-free growing window.

The first year I planted sweet potatoes, we had a cold late May and early June and the “slips” – as the young potato plants are called – decided they didn’t like the transition from Georgia to CT and they died. We order more slips, planted them, and they died. We ordered more slips, replanted them, and *some* of them survived. Sometimes, you take what you can get.

The next couple of seasons, we had good quality slips, hot weather, and nice looking crops until the deer found them. We still managed to harvest a few hundred

pounds of very tasty sweet potatoes of varying sizes. Chef Chris Prospero at Metro Bis loved the tiny ones for roasting and serving whole on the plate.

This year, when the slips arrived, they were a slimy, stinky mess of rotting leaves and roots. When I called to complain, they assured me that they would indeed grow when planted. So we sorted out the ones that weren't completely dead and planted them.

They looked pathetic the first week. Half of them withered away to nothing within days. Then an unexpected shipment of beautiful, healthy new plants arrived, about ¼ the number of the original order. I guess the nursery folks felt bad after all.

We dug up the few survivors from the previous batch, re-harrowed the field, and replanted them along with the nice new ones. The thought did cross my mind that this wasn't worth the effort, but that rational side of me was quickly eclipsed by the mad farmer in me that had visions of lush rows of bountiful plants growing fat, delicious tubers.

We managed to keep the weeds in check and the sweet potato plants loved the hot dry conditions of July and August. We've had no deer pruning thanks to the fence, and the plants look pretty good, even if the overall crop is quite a bit smaller than what we really need for the CSA. I've dug a few good-sized tubers in the last week. We're planning a member workday this Saturday to help harvest the crop. We'll use middlebuster plow (one of my favorite farm implement names!) to dig the spuds. Then, any willing hands that are present will help pick them up, bag them, and transport them to the greenhouse to cure (harden the skins).

A member emailed me some time ago to ask if we grew sweet potato greens. That was the first I'd heard of people eating the plants themselves. But a little Internet search revealed that sweet potato greens are a staple in Africa and Southeast Asia. I picked some yesterday to try at home. Heather whipped up a killer concoction of polenta, ground beef, leeks, and sweet potato greens. Oh my goodness was it good. The sweet potato greens are a sturdy, full flavored green similar to kale or calaloo. And they have that healthy feel that all good greens have.

So, for one week only, we're offering sweet potato greens to the CSA. Enjoy!

Sweet Potato Greens with Fish and Shrimp

This is another recipe for an African [greens](#) "sauce", flavored with fish and dried shrimp. This is called *Sauce aux Feuilles de Patates Douces* in French-speaking Western Africa.

What you need

- one cup cooking oil
- two to three pounds (or more) of sweet potato greens, or similar
- one onion, chopped
- one hot chile pepper, cleaned and chopped (or left whole) -- *for a spicy hot dish, cut the chile pepper into small pieces; for a milder taste, leave it whole and remove it before serving*
- one piece of dried, salted, or smoked fish (such as cod or

- herring), soaked in water and washed
- one tablespoon tomato paste
 - one-half teaspoon baking soda
 - one-half cup of dried shrimp or dried prawns (or a handful of fresh shrimp or prawns)
 - any fish, pan-fried and cut into pieces (optional)
 - chicken, pan-fried and cut into pieces (optional)
 - salt and black pepper to taste

What you do

- Heat the oil in a large pot. Add the greens, onion, pepper, dried fish, tomato paste, baking soda, and dried shrimp or prawns (if desired). Cook for fifteen minutes, stirring often.

- When greens are tender, add fresh shrimp or prawns, and fried fish or chicken. Adjust seasoning to taste. Serve with [Rice](#).

This dish can be varied by adding okra or green pepper along with the greens, or flavoring with ginger.