

RED DOG FARM



In your share this week:

Blue Potatoes
 Italian or Green Kale
 Celeriac
 Leeks
 Mache (large shares only)

Well, I hope everyone is enjoying the last few days of this decade! I sure appreciated the spectacular weather we had over Christmas, and I'm also glad to hear that it should be raining soon. It gets old to have to wait until noon for the water in the pipes to melt so we can wash the vegetables. These cold, clear, crisp nights are beautiful but I'm ready to wake up to a nice balmy 40 degree drizzly grey morning!

Now that dusk brings the close of our work day at 4:00 we often cross paths with a hawk that lives on the farm. Today we watched it swooping around the grassy kickball field, flying low, looking for rodents, and then swooping off to the parsley. So graceful and majestic!

As you'll find when you eat the kale, this cold weather does good things for the flavor of a lot of veggies, especially greens. To keep from freezing, the plants convert some of their starches to sugars, lowering the freezing point of the water inside and sweetening up our salads! Keep in mind though that veggies that have been through a hard frost sometimes don't keep as long in the refrigerator (they've been through a lot!) so the sooner you eat 'em up the better.

KALE SALAD OF THE DECADE: This kale is so sweet people were eating it raw in the field while harvesting it. I've never been a big raw kale eater but I remember a friend of mine making a raw kale salad one January in 2000 and how ravenously I devoured it- both because I was craving raw greens and because it was so surprisingly good! He cut the kale into ordinary salad-sized bits and coated them in olive oil for a little while, say 1/2 an hour. Oil helps break down the cells in hearty kale leaves and makes them easier to chew. Then he tossed in a little vinegar and salt, some raisins and walnuts. You could use any salad dressing, but I really liked how it was simple. And here I am, 10 years later, still remembering that salad and how good it was!

Celeriac, somehow, when eaten raw has a coconut flavor. When cooked it just becomes savory, sweet creamy and delicious, an essential addition to soups, but I recommend trying some of the celeriac raw, either cut it into chunks and eat it plain or grate it and make a salad of it. No, I don't peel it, but many people do.

Blue potatoes are a great all purpose tuber with a flavor similar to russets. I like them fried up with cabbage (or leftover brussels sprouts!) and crushed coriander seed. However if your conservative family is coming over for New Year's brunch, think carefully about how they will react to being served blue potatoes- I've learned that not everyone thinks they are as cool a novelty as I do.

What to say about leeks- you all know them pretty well. Clearly this is the week to make potato leek soup! My father, who was the cook in our house, made a big deal of slicing leeks and then soaking them in vinegar, I think to get the dirt out and probably also to add a zing of flavor to whatever you're cooking them in. If you're really, really tired of eating leeks (which I am not), they make neat stamps. Cut the bottom off and ink up the new end and it makes a neat pattern when printed on paper. Fun homemade thank you notes!

Large shares get mache this week, also known as corn salad or rapunzel. I'm told that Europeans go crazy over this stuff. It's a small, fleshy green leaf that hugs the ground so it grows well in cold weather. It is tender and delicious! Treat it like any salad green.

A note on last weeks' carrots: As we were packing the shares I wondered if the average CSA member prefers lots of small carrots or 1 or 2 huge carrots. A vote was taken by those present and large carrots won by a margin of 1/3. For me personally, I am unwaveringly in favor of many small carrots. I prefer their crisp texture and the small ones always seem to be sweeter. But I realize that a pile of small carrots may raise the eyebrow of some people. Large carrots are more straightforward to chop and cook with. I hope everyone found virtue in whatever size carrot they ended up with last week.

RECIPE

POTATO LEEK SOUP

This recipe is from the Food Network. I don't really know if the "bouquet garni" is necessary, but this might give you some ideas for a super flavorful soup. You could also add any leftover carrots from last week, and certainly this week's kale.

Ingredients

1 large or 2 small leeks, about 1 pound
2 bay leaves
20 black peppercorns
4 sprigs fresh thyme
2 tablespoons butter
2 strips bacon, chopped
1/2 cup dry white wine
5 cups chicken stock
1 to 1 1/4 pounds russet potatoes, diced
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
3/4 teaspoon white pepper
1/2 to 3/4 cup creme fraiche or heavy cream
2 tablespoons snipped chives
1 celeriac

Directions

Trim the green portions of the leek and, using 2 of the largest and longest leaves, make a bouquet garni by folding the 2 leaves around the bay leaves, peppercorns and thyme. Tie into a package-shaped bundle with kitchen twine and set aside. (Alternately, tie 2 leek leaves, bay leaves, peppercorns and thyme together in a piece of cheesecloth.)("or just put them in the soup and eat them like normal" says Emily)

Using a sharp knife, halve the white part of the leek lengthwise and rinse well under cold running water to rid the leek of any sand. Slice thinly crosswise and set aside. Chop the celeriac into 1/2 inch chunks.

In a large soup pot over medium heat, melt the butter and add the bacon. Cook for 5 to 6 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the bacon is very soft and has rendered most of its fat. Add the chopped leeks and celeriac and cook until wilted, about 5 minutes. Add the wine and bring to a boil. Add the reserved bouquet garni, chicken stock, potatoes, salt and white pepper, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 30 minutes, or until the potatoes are falling apart and the soup is very flavorful.

Remove the bouquet garni and if you wish, blend the soup in a food processor or with an immersion blender. Stir in the creme fraiche and adjust the seasoning, if necessary. Serve immediately, with some of the snipped chives sprinkled over the top of each bowl of soup.

Please contact me if you have any questions or relevant strong opinions that you'd like to express:
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Have a great week!