

North Creek Community Farm NEWSLETTER

Week Nine - Tuesday, August 9

IN THE BAG:

Kale	Summer squash
Carrots	Sweet corn
Tomatoes	Parsley
Garlic	Cucumbers
Salsa Packs	Potatoes



Soil fertility on the organic farm

Conventional farmers often add fertility the way most of us add leavening to our biscuits. We add baking powders and they add Nitrogen in the form of anhydrous ammonia. The traditional rotations of clover and alfalfa hay, corn and soybeans have changed to be just a rotation of corn and beans, corn and beans. The hay part of skipped. Corn prices have sky rocketed for many reasons and it is possible to grow corn after corn using chemicals to make up any short falls from lack of long rotation. Some nutrients are lost and need to be added such as potassium and some, like phosphorus get built up too high from using animal manures and have to be managed. For organic farmers, fertility comes from a good rotation and adding approved amendments. We use the natural “biological activity” of the soil to provide nutrients. The microbial life of the soil is incredibly complex and diverse. The action of all the creatures releases nutrients that are bound up in the organic matter.

In some ways, I manage a “herd” of soil life. I have to feed them and care for them. One of the best ways to increase the biological activity is to incorporate plants into the top part of the soil. These green manures or cover crops are quickly broken down by the soil life and their nutrients become available to the crops. I haven’t had my soil tested for along time but knew that some of the micronutrients were not present in the amounts they needed to be. A consultant from Midwest Bio-Ag came out and looked at the fields and took soil samples. It was nice that he was so impressed with the biological activity. We are short of calcium and boron but will correct that will the addition of some lime.

Getting cover crops in this year has been, of course, a challenge with the wet weather. I spend around \$750 a year on cover crop seeds that will just be plowed into the soil. The lime applications will run around \$1,000 but will be worth having these key elements. Without going into the exact science (because I don’t quite understand it) suffice it to say that micro-nutrients make other minerals available to the plants that are key. I have planted sorgum-sudan grass, a fast growing crop that adds lots of organic matter. Peas and oats, rye and winter wheat with an under sowing of clover will all be planted in the next few weeks, weather permitting.

About the vegetables:

The tomatoes have really begun to ripen and there will be lots more soon. The “outdoor” tomatoes, the plum tomatoes are beginning to get lots of blight but will start to ripen soon also.

I heard a rumor that cooler weather is on the way. Drier air will help many of the crops grow ahead of the diseases and begin their conversion towards fall. The winter squash is convinced that they live in the tropics and have been growing enormous plants. Its time for them to get down to the serious business of making squash. Some cooler temperatures will help.



San Francisco Garlic Fries

Bon Appétit | August 2011

Our lighter take on the Gilroy Garlic Fries at the San Francisco Giants' AT&T Park forgoes the deep fryer in favor of a hot oven.

Yield: Makes 4 to 6 servings

Active Time: 20 minutes

Total Time: 50 minutes

Nonstick vegetable oil spray

2 1/4 pounds russet potatoes, cut lengthwise into 3 x 1/3 x 1/3-inch batons

3 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

4 garlic cloves, minced

2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley

Preheat oven to 450°. Coat a large rimmed baking sheet with nonstick spray. Toss potatoes with 2 1/2 tablespoons oil in a large bowl and season with salt and pepper. Arrange in a single layer on baking sheet.

Roast the potatoes, turning occasionally, until browned and tender, about 30 minutes. Increase heat to 500°. Continue roasting until fries are deep brown in spots, about 5 more minutes.

Whisk remaining 1/2 tablespoons oil, garlic, and parsley in a large bowl. Add hot fries, season with salt and pepper, and toss to coat.

AFRICAN PEANUT STEW

Serves 4

This is one of my favorite recipes to use any greens.

2 tbs. vegetable oil

1 onion, chopped

1 can pineapple chunks or tips with juice

½ cup chunky peanut butter

chopped, clean greens, at least 4 cups.

hot sauce to taste

salt to taste

cooked brown rice

Heat the oil on medium and add chopped onion. Cook until translucent. Add the pineapple and peanut butter. Heat until the peanut butter is smooth. Add enough hot sauce to give it the bite you like. I use vietnamese garlic-chili paste. Add the greens and cook until they are tender. This will take a short time for spinach and longer for tougher greens such as kale or collards. You may need to add a little water to make the sauce the right consistency. Salt to taste. Serve over brown rice.