

April 8, 2004

This week's share:

- Onions
- Celery, OR Leeks overwintered under mulch in the field
- Bulb fennel, var. *Zefa fino*, from the heated greenhouse
- Radishes, var. *Easter egg**
- Beets, either *Chioggia* (bullseye pattern), or *Early Wonder** (traditional red)*
- Spinach, loose leaf*
- Baby salad mix*
- "Vegetable Flower"* (see story below)
- Jerusalem artichokes from John Biernbaum's garden

*=items from the hoopouses (i.e. "WOW! That grew in Michigan in the winter???)")

Announcements:

1. THANK YOU! To all of our wonderful volunteers who have harvested, seeded, planted potatoes, un-mulched strawberries, and worked on our hoopouses the past few weeks, and to the student farmers for all your hard work every day. Things are looking good out at the farm, spring is here, and we'll be in the fields

before you know it. Thanks so much for getting us there.

See Announcement #2 for an important date...

2. Members (current, past, and future), farmers, and friends: WORK HOLIDAY AT THE FARM, followed by a POTLUCK: Saturday, April 17, 2004

**Work Party: 3:00-6:00 p.m.
Potluck: 6:15-8:30 or so.**

The details: For the **work party**, come any time between 3:00 and 6:00. Dress in old clothes, plan to get dirty, wet, muddy, cold, hot, etc. depending on weather. Bring rain gear, so it won't rain. Bring water bottles (water available on farm), snacks if you like, your favorite weeding tools (or not—we've got plenty), and kids (no planned kids' activities yet, but **who wants to volunteer** to head up kids' stuff?).

For the **potluck**, try to arrive by 6:30, so we can all eat together, but if you can't come til later, please come late! Bring a **dish** to share, the **recipe** to post by your dish, your own **plates/bowls/cups/silverware**,

and things to grill if you like. We'll have a grill fired up for veggies, meat, whatever you want to share. Please bring **friends, family, and a good appetite.**

3. All previous (Fall 2003) members – please fill out and return the Fall 2003 Member Survey sent on email a few weeks ago. Thank you. Extra bonus items for those who return surveys!

4. NO Volunteer Day This Friday (April 9) – Student farmers are out of town – see you next week!

Most Thursday and Friday are good volunteer days: SEEDS need to get planted, WEEDS need pulling, SOIL should be prepared for planting, PLASTIC and hoopouses can be repaired, and of course we're harvesting for your CSA shares. Every THURSDAY morning is CSA harvest, and the more hands the better. Every FRIDAY afternoon is seeding, weeding, soil prep, maintenance, etc. Drop me an email or just show up, with old clothes (dress in layers this time of year), rain gear if necessary, and your favorite weeding tool (or use ours—there's plenty!).

5. Visits and outreach:

If *you* teach or are in a class or organization that would like to visit the farm, either for fun or as part of the coursework, please contact Emily Reardon, our Education and Outreach Coordinator, at reardone@msu.edu. We host walking tours, volunteers, interviewers, courses that use the farm as part of their curriculum, prospective or current farmers, and more.

What's up with the weird vegetables in the shares this week?

What's a **Jerusalem Artichoke**? According to the *Food Lover's Companion* (S.T. Herbst, 2001. Barron's Educational Service. New York) :

“This vegetable is not truly an artichoke but a variety of sunflower with a lumpy, brown-skinned tuber that often resembles gingerroot. Contrary to what the name implies, it his vegetable has nothing to do with Jerusalem but is derived from the Italian word for sunflower, *girasole*. Because of its confusing moniker, modern-day growers have begun to call Jerusalem artichokes *sunchokes*, which is how they're often labeled in the produce section of markets. The white flesh of this vegetable is nutty, sweet, and crunchy. Jerusalem artichokes are available from about October to March. (note: or April at the SOF –MF) Store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week. After that they may begin to wither because of moisture loss. They may be peeled, or, because the skin is very thin and

quite nutritious, simply washed well before being used. They can be eaten raw in salads or cooked by boiling or steaming and served as a side dish. They also make a delicious soup. Jerusalem artichokes are a good source of iron.”

What’s a “**vegetable flower**”? This one has an interesting story: Last year a group of Bailey scholars came out to rip weeds out of the hoopouses, including some bolted, flowering Chinese cabbage. (Bolting means a normally non-flowering crop has sent up a flower stalk, induced by heat/moisture stress) Blong Yang, a Hmong student, was so excited to see the flowering vegetable, that instead of weeding it, he convinced us to harvest it and try it. He taught the rest of the folks that in Hmong cuisine, there’s a very similar cabbage-family plant that is harvested at the flowering stage and used as a cooking green (we liked it fresh, too). Translated to English, the name of the plant is “Vegetable flower.” This spring one of our experimental, early-spring hoopouse crops was Chinese cabbage. The hot, sunny days a couple of weeks ago induced our young cabbage plants to bolt upward instead of forming a normal head, so instead of calling it a failed experiment, we thought you’d enjoy the opportunity to try “vegetable flower” yourselves. Use it as you

would use Chinese, or Napa, cabbage – chopped fresh as a salad, stirfried (maybe with sunchokes?), or in Asian soups or eggrolls.

What do you do with **bulb fennel**, or *finocchio*? Again, according to *Food Lover’s Companion*,

“Both the base and stems can be eaten raw in salads or cooked in a variety of methods such as braising, sautéing, or in soups. The fragrant, graceful greenery can be used as a garnish or snipped like dill and used for a last-minute flavor enhancer. This type of fennel is often mislabeled ‘sweet anise,’ causing those who don’t like the flavor of licorice to avoid it. The flavor of fennel, however, is sweeter and more delicate than anise and, when cooked, becomes even lighter and more elusive than in its raw state..... Refrigerate, tightly wrapped in a plastic bag, up to 5 days. Fennel is rich in vitamin A and contains a fair amount of calcium, phosphorous, and potassium.”

What are **Chioggia Beets**? A variety of beet with concentric white and red rings in the root – also called “bullseye” or “candy cane” beets. Some people think they have a more delicate flavor than traditional red beets, and they certainly have a more delicate color – in my opinion, the cool thing about these beets is that they *don’t* turn everything in the kitchen (and your meal) red when you cut and cook with them. As with all beets, the greens are delicious and can be used interchangeably with Swiss chard.

Fun Vegetable Fact: Swiss chard (*Beta vulgaris*) and Beets (*Beta vulgaris*) are the same species! Chard varieties have been bred for their leafy greens, while beet varieties have been bred for their large roots. *Beta vulgaris* is student farmer Lynn Rhodes' favorite vegetable crop.

Recipes

Here are some recipe ideas – you'll have to do a little scouting this week if you're the kind of person who likes to cook with specific amounts and measurements.

Onion Skin Easter Eggs

If you decorate Easter eggs, try using onion skins as a natural dye. If you have old skins saved, or at least 6 onions' worth of skins, just toss the papery skins into a medium saucepan with water, bring to a boil, and let steep for a while (as long as you can wait—maybe an hour or so). Gently put your hard-boiled eggs (white eggs – onion skin dye is less exciting on brown eggs) into the onion skin “tea” and let them hang out til they're whatever shade of reddish-brown you like. Dry.

Onion skin dye can be used with wax-resist egg decorating – use a white crayon OR melted wax like you'd use for Ukranian egg decorating, and design the egg however you like. When wax hardens, gently submerge in dye

bath; don't knock them around while dyeing, especially if using melted wax—it can come off. Let them set until desired shade is achieved. Dry gently with a paper towel, and gently scrape off wax (not necessary if you use white crayon).

Scalloped Fennel-Potatoes

Using a scalloped potato recipe, substitute bulb fennel slices for up to half of the potato slices. Alternate them in the dish. Choose a pungent, hard cheese like Asiago or Parmesan, and douse heavily with fresh ground black pepper.

You can also do all fennel, if you have enough, and you love fennel!

Sunchoke-cabbage-celery/fennel slaw

Just like coleslaw, but farmier. Shred the cabbage, grate or make matchsticks of the sunchoke, chop the celery and/or fennel finely. Add chopped fresh parsley, carrots, ginger, nuts, and/or leeks/onions if you have them. Dress the whole thing with a light vinegar, like rice vinegar. Dash of honey or maple syrup optional. Toss in some caraway seeds, salt, pepper, paprika. Mix well. Enjoy.

**Have a great weekend, everyone!
See you at the potluck.**