

Fair Fields News

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On the Farm

We have had a very different start than we had last season. By this time last year we were into the start of what would be one of the worse droughts in recent history. This season the rain has been steady and the temperatures cool. The crops in the greenhouse, that we are now enjoying, were protected and are doing very well. The field crops, however, are behind. We were first delayed by waiting for a dry window when we could cultivate and plant. Now we are mostly caught up with planting, but the cool temperatures are keeping the growth relatively slow. For these reasons we may have a week or two where we are scrambling to fill the shares. If it seems too much we will likely pause for a week and simply extend the finish date of the CSA by a week. We will try to give you lot's of notice if this is the case.

One crop that has not minded the cool wet

Asparagus

Native to most of Europe, North Africa and western Asia, asparagus is cultivated as a vegetable crop in many parts of the world. It arrived in North America about 150 years ago.

Asparagus is in season in Ontario from early May through to early July depending on your location. It is a perennial the starts

weather is the strawberry. Our plants are loaded with flowers and some young green fruits are starting to grow.

Our garden is the farthest it has ever been from the house this year. This makes it a little longer to walk out to, but the main detractor is that it has been getting more deer damage. So far they have been very selective, only eating the fennel and a couple of lettuce heads. We realize some members will not be at all saddened by this... We only hope the damage doesn't spread to other crops. Time for our dog, Lewis, to earn his keep and keep them away!

We started a pickup in Kitchener this year. We are hoping this helps us reach our goal for 75 members, the minimum we need for the operation to be financially viable. At 67 members, we are fairly close, however, we still have room in all of our pickups. So if you know anyone who is

by sending up shoots or 'spears' that can be harvested for about 6-8 weeks depending on the health and age of the patch. These shoots are eventually left to 'fern' out, becoming woody and less flavourful and growing quite tall.

In Ontario there is one pest that commonly affects asparagus, the aptly named 'asparagus beetle'. It emerg-

interested, please send them our way!



He has not had a chance to meet you yet as he is working his way through the flu, but you will all soon be introduced to our intern, Jordan. Jordan hails from the Midland Penetanguishene area. He brings a love of the outdoors, canoeing, foraging wild foods and exploring the countryside. His laid back attitude, keen desire to learn about food production and foraged food dinner dishes are a welcome addition to Fair Fields.

Harvesting

- **Asparagus**
- **Head Lettuce**
- **Herbs**
- **Pak Choy**
- **Rhubarb**
- **Radishes**
- **Spinach**
- **Tatsoi**



es soon after the asparagus and feeds on the new shoots. There are natural predators and several other organic controls for this beetle, but none are 100% effective. For this reason you will notice some damage, in the form of small indentations or dimples, on most organic asparagus.

Asparagus is great grilled,

roasted, sautéed and steamed. It works in stir-fries and sautéed with other vegetables, just try not to overcook it whatever you do. Our favourite way is lightly steamed with butter and lemon, or grilled with a little olive oil.

We don't grow asparagus and so source it from a farmer down the road, Ahren Hughes. He grows great asparagus, so we know you will enjoy it!

Recipe Ideas

Ontario Asparagus and Bok-Choy Frittata

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp cooking oil
- 3 scallions including green tops, sliced
- 1 tsp grated fresh ginger
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 small head bok choy cut into 1-inch pieces
- ¾ lb asparagus, spears cut into 1-inch pieces
- ¾ tsp salt
- 9 eggs, beaten to mix
- ¼ tsp black pepper

- 1 tsp sesame oil

Preparation:

Heat oven to 325°. In a medium frying pan, heat the cooking oil over moderate heat. add the scallions, ginger, and garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the bok choy and cook, stirring, until the leaves wilt. Add the asparagus and ½ tsp of the salt and continue to cook, until the vegetables are almost tender. Evenly distribute the vegetables in the pan and add the eggs, pepper, and the remaining ¼ tsp of salt.

Cook the frittata, without stirring, until the edges start to set, about 2 minutes. put the frittata in the oven and bake until firm, about 25 minutes. drizzle the sesame oil over the top.

Ginger Sesame Boc Choy (or Tatsoi...)

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp rice vinegar
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1/4 tsp toasted sesame oil
- 5 slices peeled fresh ginger
- 1-2 heads bok choy or tatsoi, (1 pound), with leaves seperated

Preparation:

In a small bowl, whisk together vinegar, soy sauce, and sesame oil. Set aside.

In a large skillet with a tight-fitting lid, bring 1 cup water and ginger to a boil. Add the bok choy; reduce to a simmer. Cover and cook until leaves are vibrant green and stems are fork-tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Drain well; discard ginger.

Transfer bok choy to a serving platter; drizzle with the vinegar-soy mixture, and serve immediately.

Early Bugs...

This year we again have had a problem with aphids.

Aphids feed on sap as opposed to the flesh of the plants. For this reason the damage they cause is less obvious to begin with. They are very good at encouraging and spreading disease, so if left uncontrolled the impact of aphids on a crop can be devastating.

Though a serious pest for some farmers, we don't worry too much about aphids because they have been kept under control on our farm by natural predators. Early in the season, in the artificial conditions of a green-

house, however, there are not the predators to keep them at bay. We also use row cover, a netting that provides a physical barrier to pests, over our cole crops (like tatsoi and bok choy), which keeps out natural predators as they arrive.

In our case the damage from the aphids is not killing the plants, it is however causing the lower leaves to develop some mold and is drying out affected leaves during the hot dry windy weather we have been having. They are also fairly numerous

and therefore take several washes to remove before eating...

To try and control the aphids, we have been applying diatomaceous earth, a white powder made by grinding fossilized crustaceans, which has many sharp edges that lacerate the skin of soft bodied pests. we are using neem oil, a natural insecticide derived from an evergreen tree from the Indian subcontinent that has been in use for centuries. We only use neem early on for our greens, as the smell and flavour is quite

pungent and we don't want this to be on the food we eat!

Next year we will have to try some other strategies for the aphids as they are becoming an ongoing problem in early spring. One option we are considering is buying a bag of lady bugs and releasing them in our seedling greenhouse and season extension hoop-house. This is an expensive, but hopefully effective option.



Opportunities to Visit the Farm

There are plenty of opportunities for you to visit the farm this season. As with past years we welcome volunteers to come and work with us transplanting, weeding, harvesting and with other farm tasks. Please let us know if this interests you and we will try to figure out some good times to get you out to the farm.

As our strawberries, and later our raspberries, come into full production we will be in touch to offer U-pick to CSA members. Our strawberries from last year have been overridden with weeds, but should still produce many good berries.

We will again host a CSA

BBQ on the farm this August, the exact date still to be determined. Last year we had a great turn out and very good weather, which made for a wonderful time. We hope you can all join us this year and help make it even better!

Finally, we welcome anyone to visit the farm if they

are in the area or passing through, just let us know ahead of time. If the timing is good we can go for a brief tour of the gardens and share a snack together.

We want people to feel connected to their food and where it is grown, so feel welcome!