



Travelogue

Chioggia Beets
 Gobo Root
 Carrots
 Celeriac
 Kale Tops
 Sweet Onions
 Caribe Potatoes
 Salad Mix
 Spinach
 Red or Savoy Cabbage
 Purple Top Turnips
 Beauty Heart Winter Radish
 Dried Hot Peppers
 Rosemary
 Spearmint

We had planned after the Terra Madre conference in Turin to head to Bologna, where we had read about a wonderful central market that was not to be missed; then on to Milan, the home of chocolate. Our plans changed when our host, Nico, suggested we head south to the Ligurian coast (between the “boot” and France’s Riviera) to see the extensive greenhouse operations in the valleys around the coastal town of Albenga. Following a day of recovery in Turin after the intensity of the conference, we rented a car and jumped into the city’s streets.

Now, we have always heard that Italian drivers are, well, Italian in their approach to the roads. We feel obliged to report that it is absolutely true. I will also say that Kim fit right in. I refused to get behind the wheel. Still, once you understood the rules of the road, it was easy to fit right in. We noticed that traffic that had a technical right of way seemed more than willing to slow down for a vehicle pulling out in front of them (especially valuable with the large number of blind intersections in the small towns), and drivers seemed less inclined to the horn, although one was occasionally heard.

We traveled to the coast via the backroads, through the incredible southern mountains where small towns perched on hillsides overlooking the forests, and every so often we would come upon a small vegetable farm with a small range of greenhouses, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Once we came upon a herd of sheep and goats, several with bells around their necks, grazing fallen chestnuts from the road.

Coming into Albenga, the mountain valley opened slightly, and suddenly the countryside was full of greenhouses of all descriptions, from inexpensive plastic covered tunnels with manual ventilation to complexes of glasshouses. Often, the greenhouse operation was accompanied by an outdoor field of potted rosemary and lavender, all abutted with gardens full of olive trees, ripening winter squash, citrus, fennel, and endive.

After a pleasant night and morning in Albenga, we traveled east to Genoa, thinking to take in some museums and the port that was the birthplace to Columbus. But getting off the freeway in Genoa gave us another idea right away: get out of the city and as far as we could as fast as we could. The place was crazy with scooters, one-way streets, and a seeming lack of street signs (although maybe they were just all in Italian!), with no time to slow down and figure out where we were or what we were doing. We bolted back to the freeway just as fast as we could (which wasn’t very fast), and headed east along the coast until we neared the Cinque Terre, a series of five village along the coast we had heard about from friends at Terra Madre. The two days we spent here contained the most impressive agricultural and cultural sights we saw during our brief tour of northwestern Italy, and I will write more about them in the next newsletter.

Comings and Goings: After deliveries two weeks ago, Chris headed straight to New Prague to share our financial planning experiences with the Land Stewardship Project’s Farm Beginnings program. Chris’ dad, Bob, came for a short visit over Thanksgiving; we feasted all day, with course after course of fabulous eats.

Weather: It has finally turned cold, with a low of nine degrees at the house on Tuesday morning. The gray weather has left the greenhouses cooler than we would like, but still warm enough that we should be able to produce spinach and some limited salad greens right through the winter.

Activities on the Farm: Thanksgiving week deliveries and feasting kept us busy for most of the past two weeks, but we did get the sheep pen set up for the winter, fixed some fence, and split some firewood. A hired bulldozer installed new waterways in the east field to dispose of excess water; regraded the space in front of the transplant greenhouse for safer tractor operation when we are handling heavy materials; and installed a new, small terrace on the north side of the west field that will make mowing much easier, and provide a little more space for crops. And Chris and Kim began planning in earnest for the 2005 production season.

The next box may include: Mache, carrots, beets, rutabagas, shallots, rosemary, and much, much more...

The Farm Kitchen

The curly green rosette in your box this week is a **Kale Top**, the hardiest of winter's cooking greens. The large lower leaves have been included in your box once this winter, and are a common site on food store shelves; we harvested the top growing point this week while ice was still clinging to the leaves. Due to the frosts, the leaves are slightly more wilted than summer and early fall kale, but this only contributes to a silkier texture; and the frost really sweetens the kale's flavor. We chose a simple preparation this week, simply sautéing the chopped leaves in bacon drippings (olive oil would work equally well) until they turned bright green—everybody agreed it was delicious.

In a bag, you will find **Dried Hot Peppers**, the basic precursor to hot pepper flakes: grind them in a clean coffee grinder or mortar and pestle to make that great addition to pizzas and pastas.

The longish, often forked, light brown root in your box this week, while an old vegetable, will probably be new to you. Cultivated in Japan since the 10th century, **Gobo Root** (the cultivated form of burdock, the common weed with the sticky burrs) is valued as a nutritious food with medicinal values as a blood purifier and aid in arthritis and skin conditions. We enjoy it for its hearty, earthy flavor, similar to mushrooms, added to soups, rice dishes, and root vegetable purees. Slice it very thinly, or shave with a vegetable peeler, then soak in cold water while you prepare the rest of the ingredients for your dish, changing the water once.

Spicy Cabbage with Gobo Root

1/3 cup burdock root, chopped into small pieces
1/3 cup onion, chopped
4 tablespoons olive oil
3 cups shredded cabbage
2 tablespoons sesame seeds
1/2 teaspoon hot pepper flakes
salt and pepper to taste
dash or two of ginger juice or some thinly sliced ginger
Place the burdock into a bowl of cold water to soak. Cook the onions lightly in the olive oil, add the burdock root, cabbage, sesame seeds, and hot pepper. Cook until the cabbage is tender about 10 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste. Add the ginger, toss and serve.

The **Spearmint** and the **Rosemary** were both harvested this week from overwintering plants in our heated greenhouse. Spearmint is only marginally hardy in our climate, so we mulch it heavily outdoors and propagate more plants indoors. Rosemary is not hardy at all in the Upper Midwest, so we dig any field plants and bring them inside for the winter; we also grow a number of large plants in very large pots in the greenhouse year round.

Turkey Soup with Mint

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 onions chopped (about 2 cups)
8 cups turkey stock or chicken stock
1/4 cup white rice (not cooked)

4-6 carrots, sliced (to make 1 cup)
2 tablespoons chopped ginger
1 1/2 cups diced cooked turkey or chicken
3 tablespoons lemon juice
2 teaspoons hot pepper flakes
1-2 tablespoons finely shredded mint leaves
salt and fresh ground pepper

Heat a large pot add olive oil and onions, lightly sweat the onions, about 7 minutes. Add stock, carrots, and rice. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and cover. Simmer for 10 minutes then add the ginger, turkey, lemon juice, and hot pepper flakes. Continue to simmer until rice is cooked and vegetables are tender. Salt and pepper to taste and add mint. Serve.

Red-skinned **Chioggia Beets** have a cool bull's-eye pattern inside, known in the beet world as "zoning". Chioggia beets have a less earthy flavor than the standard beets, and baking them preserves the cool coloration. We bake our beets in a covered baking dish at about 400 for about an hour.

Purple-skinned **Caribe Potatoes** have a bright white flesh, and make an outstanding mashed potato; I like to leave the skins on for the bright purple flecks that result. Some of these are a little ugly and bumpy; we hilled them a little late due to the frequent rains this summer, and when we hilled we hit some spuds the disks.

Knobbly **Celeriac** adds a great celery flavor to soups and stews, and is especially useful with turkey leftovers. Use anywhere you would celery. Celeriac combines especially well with potatoes, as in the following recipe.

Celeriac and Potato Puree

2 lbs potatoes, cubed
1lb Celeriac, peeled, and cubed
1 teaspoon rosemary, minced
4 tablespoons butter
1/4 cup cream or milk
1/4 cup chicken stock
salt and pepper to taste
Preheat oven to 375. Boil potatoes and celeriac together in a large pot, until they are tender, about 10 minutes. Drain and put on baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes (this dries the potatoes and celeriac out). Melt the butter and add the rosemary to it. After the potatoes and celeriac are baked mash them with the butter (or pass through a potato ricer). Add the stock and cream, stir, season with salt and pepper.

Rock Spring Farm · Chris and Kim Blanchard
563-735-5613 · www.rsfarm.com · realfood@rsfarm.com
3765 Highlandville Road, Spring Grove, MN 55974