



Carrots
 Red Beets
 Yellow Onions
 Yukon Gold Potatoes
 Rutabagas
 Shallots
 Kabocha Squash
 Parsnips
 Turnips
 Salad Mix
 Dried Tomatoes
 Scarborough Herb Bunch
 Beauty Heart Winter Radish
**And a very happy
 holidays to everyone!**

Cinque Terre

The Cinque Terre, where we ended our trip to Italy, is to farming what the coast of Maine is to rocky coast lines, or Northern California to redwood forests: a place of startling drama. The amazingly folded coastline, where the mountains that divide Piemonte from the coast drop precipitously into the Mediterranean, alternates between semi-cultivated groves of olives, terraced vineyards and gardens, wild forest remnants and barren rock outcroppings, often with no transition at all.

The Cinque Terre region is named for the five villages wedged into a series of coves between sheer cliffs. Remotely located on the rugged coastline, the Cinque Terre are connected by walking paths that connect the villages, and it was a path along the coastline that we walked from east to west, having caught the train from our base of Levanto to the eastern village of Riomaggiore.

Forests once covered the shores of the Mediterranean, but like many landscapes inhabited by ancient civilizations, the trees retreated under man's influence. In the Cinque Terre, the forests were replaced by communally-built terraces—longer in total, it is claimed, than China's Great Wall. Walk around any corner on the hiking trail, or look up from any street or narrow passageway in a village, and you are likely to see these gardens, perched treacherously on the steep

slopes. Indeed, in some terraced patches, it appears that one misstep could send an unwary farmer plunging into the ocean. For farmers like ourselves, the museums and architecture of Turin paled in comparison.

Throughout the day-long hike, we were left with the question, what's different here? The landscape of the Upper Midwest, even in our own hilly Driftless Region, certainly lacks the visual drama of the Liguarian coast, but it was more than that: the very nature of the agriculture in the Cinque Terre felt different from that of our neighborhood. Nonetheless, it could hardly be called less destructive of the original natural environment than the plowing of the prairies, having deforested the hillsides; and it was very much a man-made environment. So what was it that felt so *right*?

The agriculture of the Cinque Terre, and much of what we saw in Piemonte and Liguria, seemed very much to *belong* in its place. Although it obviously dominated the landscape, the agriculture seemed to lack the running roughshod approach to the land and community than the corn and bean monoculture of our area. Maybe it was the fact that farmers were producing an artisanal product that captured the unique flavors of their environment, rather than more of a commodity that nobody seems to want more of. Maybe it was just the history of farming in the Cinque Terre, where land abstracts go back to the fifth century. And maybe it was the human scale of production, with terraces too narrow for a tractor. And maybe it was the consideration involved in the construction of those terraces, communal hand labor requiring more thought and commitment than bulldozed drainage ways (of which we have installed a few on our farm); why would you put all of that work into making the land farmable just to grow a bunch of soybeans for ADM?

We don't need a "Cinque Terre" farm here, with hand-built stone terraces hugging the hillside; our land is more plentiful, and less steep, than that mountainous coast, and the climate is dramatically different. But we do need to find a way to farm that fits the landscape better, and does more justice to the environment and the community, than the endless sea of corn and beans that surrounds us. We—and that means eaters as well as farmers—need to find a way to belong to the land that so fleetingly belongs to us.

Comings and Goings: Last weekend, Chris and Kim traveled to New York to attend a conference on winter greenhouse production. Not many people are doing this in the Midwest, so we have to go a ways to find good information. Information at the conference included an explanation of the challenges that we face here that farmers in Vermont and Maine seem to skirt around (namely, November and December clouds that don't allow us to "bank" heat in the soil of our greenhouses). Just before leaving, Chris spent two days in the cities meeting with current and prospective wholesale accounts to make plans for next year.

Weather: Continued gray, with finally some cold weather this week. Where's the snow? Unlike folks who have to commute, we love the snow—it insulates the ground and overwintering crops, and it keeps the kids busy sledding (us, too!).

Activities on the Farm: After packing CSA boxes two weeks ago, we unloaded the rented refrigerated semi-trailer into our too-small walk-in cooler (to get the last box of celeriac in the door, we had to lift one box up to the ceiling while shoving another under it), and had the trailer taken away. The next day we received a full semi-trailer full of potting mix; some of it we will resell to other growers, but we use over half a semi each year ourselves. Isabel turned three on Monday.

**This is the Last Winter Box
 Look for a January Vegetable and Citrus offer in your Email Soon!**

The Farm Kitchen

As you already know, the Scarborough Herb Bunch contains (everybody sing!) parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme.

For rutabagas, we have found no better treatment than this (you can substitute some turnips for some rutabagas with very nice results):

Rutabaga Gratin

1-1/2 lbs rutabaga, sliced very thin

2 tbsp flour

1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary

1 cup grated parmesan

1 cup heavy cream

1/2 cup chicken stock or water

2 cloves minced garlic

Preheat oven to 375. Steam rutabaga slices for about three minutes, until crisp tender. Butter a 5 x 9 baking dish. Arrange 1/3 of the rutabaga slices evenly over the bottom and sprinkle with 1/2 of the rosemary, 1/2 of the flour, 1/3 of the parmesan, and black pepper. Add a second layer, and sprinkle with the remaining rosemary and flour, another 1/3 of the parmesan, and black pepper. Add a third layer, and sprinkle with parmesan and black pepper. Combine the cream, stock, and garlic and bring the mixture just to a boil. Pour over the rutabagas. Cover and bake for 30 minutes, then uncover and bake for an additional 20 minutes or so, until browned.

Green **Kabocha Squash** is one of our favorites, with a dry flesh and rich squash flavor. We especially enjoy it baked. The skin makes a great appetizer seasoned with tamari soy sauce and baked in the oven. As a bonus, the skins of these already-nutritious squash are several times higher in nutrients such as the antioxidant lutein than the flesh.

We don't can many tomatoes over the summer, but we dry a whole bunch for use in all sorts of dishes over the winter. In other climates, sun-drying might work, but for truth-in-labeling purposes, we just call ours **Dried Tomatoes**. Rehydrate in warm water for five minutes for use in pasta sauces, or just add to soup.

Spaghetti with Dried Tomatoes and Pine Nuts

1/2 cup olive oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 cups bread crumbs (I like Japanese Panko found in the Asian section of the grocery store)

Salt and fresh ground pepper

1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted

1 lb. thin spaghetti

1/2 cup raisins

1/2 teaspoon hot pepper flakes

1/2 cup dried tomatoes (soaked in hot water to cover for 5 minutes then chopped)

Put a large pot of salted water on to boil. Cook pasta until al dente. Heat the oil and garlic in a heavy skillet over medium heat until the garlic just starts to brown. Toss in the bread crumbs, and season with salt and pepper, cook stirring often, until the crumbs brown and turn crisp, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and stir in pine nuts. Add 1/2 cup of the tomato water to the skillet and cook the tomatoes, raisins, and hot pepper flakes, about 5 minutes, season with salt and pepper. Add the drained, cooked pasta to the skillet along with half the bread crumb mixture and toss. You may need to add more olive oil if the pasta seems dry. Serve with the remaining crumbs sprinkled on top.

We ran a little short on greens this week, so everybody received a generous 12 oz of **Salad Mix** instead of our one pound goal. Sorry.

This week's **Yukon Gold Potatoes** look a little measles-y, but they are fine to eat. We have had some stored in our kitchen at room temperature for several weeks, with no problems.

Parsnip Bisque

1 pound parsnips, peeled and trimmed, chopped into one inch pieces

1 tablespoon olive oil

1/2 medium onion, chopped coarse

3-4 carrots, peeled and trimmed, chopped into one inch pieces

4 shallots, chopped coarse

4 cups chicken broth

1/2 cup heavy cream

salt and pepper

1/8 teaspoon nutmeg

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a shallow baking pan toss parsnips, onion, carrots, and shallots with olive oil to coat and arrange in one layer. Roast in middle of oven, turning occasionally, 30 - 40 minutes.

In a large saucepan simmer broth with roasted vegetables, covered, 20 minutes. In a blender puree mixture in batches with cream (use caution when blending hot liquids) and transfer soup to cleaned saucepan. Stir in nutmeg and salt and pepper to taste.

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