



How Far We've Come

One night this week, I began looking around at our farm and really marveling at how far we had come since we moved here back in 1999. We spent a couple of afternoons this week working to pull together the shop—the two-car garage where our family spent the winter while our house was under construction—and I couldn't help but remember that when we moved onto the farm, my mudroom doubled as the toolshed, and the backyard of the house became the shop. We felt that we had really upgraded when we pulled the abandoned, wheel-less silage wagon into the middle of the farmyard. Dad and Mary chipped in money to buy plywood for the floor, and we fixed tractors underneath the far-leaning silver maple that dominated the farmyard.

That first year, we packed our vegetables under that same silver maple until we got the concrete slab poured for a packing shed. We stored harvested vegetables in the below-grade, limestone block basement, and on farmers market mornings we hauled produce down to our Toyota Previa minivan for the trip to Rochester (it now has over 200,000 miles on it, and it's still our primary vehicle); eight year-old Zane and I would pull our seats all the way forward to make room for a few more vegetables. We finished building the cooler in August of that year. We didn't get the packing shed built, so in the winter we dragged our wash tank into the kitchen, filled it from the tap in the basement using a garden hose, and drained it outdoors using a sump pump. Now, we have a real packing house, with an honest-to-goodness floor drain and silt trap, and 600 square feet of walk-in cooler; produce takes a fifty-foot trip from cooler to refrigerated truck on a pallet jack.

In the spring of that year, we used our basement for a potting shed because we didn't have enough greenhouse space to grow transplants and tomato plants at the same time. We would mix soil in the yard when the weather was good, and haul it uphill to the basement where we made turned it into soil blocks and plant the seeds, then carry flats down to the greenhouse where we set them between tomato plants. Now with almost a quarter-acre of greenhouses, we still don't have enough room, but at least we do make our blocks in the greenhouse!

When we looked at the farm the first time, the realtor declared that the house was unlivable. It had no windows left and no furnace. The east end of the house was being held up by a scissors jack, like you would use to hold up your car while you change your tire. Doors on the inside had been sided over on the outside, and another had been nailed shut so that it didn't open onto the steps to the basement—a seven foot drop. We did replace the jack with a 2x12, and put in some windows and a woodstove. This became home for the next 7 years. Last summer, we bulldozed the house, moved into the garage which we are now turning into a shop while a new house was under construction.

It is with great satisfaction this spring that I have had the chance to sit at the bar between the living room and kitchen, looking out over the fields and tapping away at my laptop, and work with Frankie to hang plywood walls in the shop, or wash carrots and lettuce in the packing house under bright lights, stack them on a pallet, and roll them into the cooler.

We could not have come this far without a lot of help from family and friends, but in the end, if it weren't for customers wanting great food and driving us to provide it, all the while continuing to support us in our passion and expertise, none of it would have been possible or done with good reason. Not even putting a floor in the silage wagon.

Spring Green Share

Asparagus
Garlic Greens
Carrots
Red Leaf Lettuce
Green Leaf Lettuce
Baby Bok Choi
Cress
Lovage
Thyme

Weather: Wow, is it dry out there! The beginning of the week was cool, great working weather, then things turned hot. The soil surface has turned dry and dusty, but we still have surprisingly good moisture down just an inch or two.

Comings and Goings: After deliveries last Friday, Chris picked up his Dad, Bob, who flew out from Colorado for the week. Then, on Monday, three new crew members started their year: Kris returned to Decorah from her studies in agriculture at Iowa State University to begin her second year as a Rock Spring Farmer; Owen, who helped out with some massive lettuce harvests back in 2002 and has recently been studying music performance (saxophone) at the University of Northern Iowa, came on board; and Katie from Mabel, Minnesota, who has been studying music at Augsburg College, also joined the crew. We are very pleased to welcome such a bright, hardworking, and diversely-skilled group of people to the farm this summer!

Activities on the Farm: Kim and Chris opened the main season of the Rochester Downtown Farmers Market on Saturday. On Sunday, we took advantage of the weather to seed another round of peas, salad, and herbs, and ran a second round of tractor cultivation on the onions. Chris and Bob laid out new contours and miniature fields on one of the ridges. We work hard here to keep our rows short for easier picking—and a sense of accomplishment when you get to the end of a row! - so we have a lot of space devoted to turning tractors around, as well as access points for harvest vehicles. It seems a little like wasted space, but it makes great beneficial insect habitat when planted to crops like white clover and birdsfoot trefoil. Frankie continued to work to put our new shop space together while the rest of the crew did some handweeding. And, of course, we harvested our crops (asparagus, asparagus, asparagus!) and washed and packed it for delivery to you!

Our Best Guess Estimate for next week's box includes green and red lettuces, French breakfast radishes, asparagus, scallions, and more.

The Farm Kitchen

We are continuing on with the asparagus this week, and really enjoying it. I love to munch on the raw stalks right out in the field. I just can't say enough about this great vegetable, although a bit of trivia may be in order: asparagus is actually a close relative of the lily and the entire range of onions.

I don't normally equate spring delicacies with soup, and I don't normally equate soup with fast, but Kim made this cream of asparagus soup for lunch today and it was out of this world:

Simple Cream of Asparagus Soup

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 onion

3 medium potatoes

1 pound or so of asparagus

8 cups of chicken or vegetable broth

1 cup cream, half and half or milk

Salt and pepper to taste

2 teaspoons fresh chopped thyme

Heat the oil in a soup pot, chop onion and sauté until soft. Cut the potatoes into 1 inch cube, sauté lightly with the onion. 5 min. or so. Cut the asparagus into 1 inch pieces, add this along with the 8 cups of broth to the onion and potatoes. Simmer until potatoes are tender. Puree in blender, salt and pepper to taste.

Add the cream and thyme, stir and serve.

We packaged the **cress** in a plastic clamshells to keep it from getting banged around, and because it looks so nice. The small leaves have a peppery tang similar to, but distinct from, arugula, and we have enjoyed their flavor-boost in salads this week. I think it would be fantastic heaped on a fresh-from-the-grill steak or a savory sandwich. **Lovage**, which looks like parsley but smells like celery, was an essential ingredient in an ancient Roman cooking. Expect a taste a little like celery on steroids—a little bit goes a long way. Use in soups or stews, or chopped finely and added to salads, as a flavor booster, akin to parsley, but don't get carried away. Also, the fibrous stalks should be used for flavoring but discarded before serving.

Looking somewhat like scallions—or maybe more like little leeks—**garlic greens** are one of our favorite spring vegetables. Well, maybe all of the spring vegetables are our favorite spring vegetables! Their flavor relates to that of mature garlic the way scallions relate to mature onions, and you can use them just as you would scallions. The pair especially nicely with sautéed asparagus.

Green Garlic Vinaigrette

1 garlic green

4 Tbsp red wine vinegar

1/3 cup olive oil

Salt and pepper

Finely chop the garlic green. Put it in a small bowl with the vinegar and salt. Stir and let the mixture sit for 10 to 30 Minutes. Whisk in the olive oil.

Baby Bok Choi has thick, crisp stems and tender leaves, and makes a great addition to salads and stir fries. We also like it in miso soup.

Carrots continue to emerge from the dark of our walk-in cooler. People always ask us how we store them so long, and the answer provides insight into the best way to store most roots and greens: we keep them in our walk-in cooler, in the dark, in a loosely closed plastic bag. Now, our plastic bag holds 2,000 pounds of carrots, and our cooler is a little over 600 square feet, but the principle is the same: cold and humid, but not wet.

Along with lovage, **thyme** is usually one of the first herbs to green up in our garden. Early in the season, it often has some woody component, and the leaves should be stripped from the stems. The leaves will keep for a long time in a loosely closed plastic bag (in fact, we just found a little bit of packaged thyme harvested back in November, and it still looked pretty serviceable), and make a great accompaniment to carrots and asparagus.

The **lettuces** this week continue to come from the greenhouse. The growth of the green lettuces almost always outpaces that of the red, since more of the sunlight energy follows the photosynthetic pathways offered by the chlorophyll, rather than being absorbed by the anthocyanin pigments of the red-leaved plants. This explains why we rarely, if ever, see red-leaved plants in nature except during the fall of the year.

A Little of Everything Salad

Some green leaf lettuce, torn to bite sized

Some red leaf lettuce, torn to bite sized

1 cup Bok Choi leaves, chopped

1/4 cup Lovage, chopped

A couple of carrots, grated

1/2 cup asparagus, tips (use remaining part of stalk for soup)

Cress

2 stalks garlic greens, minced

2 Tbsp olive oil

2 tsp lemon juice (fresh, if possible)

Salt and pepper

Wash all of the leafy things and dry well. Add the lettuces, bok choi, lovage, carrots, and asparagus to a bowl and toss. Mix the garlic, olive oil, lemon juice, and season generously with salt and pepper. Toss this dressing with the salad mixture just before serving. Top with a sprinkle or two of cress.