

In Kim's Kitchen

I would like to say a word here about **Zucchini**, because I feel that it is a much maligned vegetable. Planting too many and having to give them away in baskets by the side of the road is a standard story in the gardening lexicon, and visitor Meg Moynihan has actually suggested that we look at zucchini as a potential source of biofuels, because they are so prolific and overabundant in season. However, when harvested at a relatively small size, zucchini has a mild, pleasant flavor with a slight nutty note, and makes a nice feature ingredient or add-in to soups and stir-fries. We like to slice them thinly and add to cooking rice for color and flavor.

Zucchini Carpaccio

Slice zucchini extremely thinly, or use a vegetable peeler to shave off layer. Lay zucchini strips flat on a large platter, and drizzle with a high-quality olive oil. Lightly season with good sea salt and fresh-ground black pepper. Chill briefly, and serve.

Our crop of garlic is still curing in the barn, so this week's **Rocamboles Garlic** won't store for a tremendously long time, and I would still keep them in the refrigerator rather than the pantry. We have enjoyed having the fresh garlic crop around, and have been using it widely and with vigor, especially because the Rocamboles garlic peels so easily.

Fresh Red Onions continue to fill the seasonal gap between the last of the scallions and mini onions and the first of the cured onions. Store in a bag in the refrigerator, and use as you would any other onion. These reds make a nice sandwich or hamburger onion.

We snuck in another crop of **Spinruts**, our name for the white Japanese turnips we grow. At this time of the season, they have a slightly stronger flavor, but still relatively mild and delicious. We like them steamed until just barely fork-tender, and are always careful not to overcook them. The greens are delicious as well, especially when quickly sautéed with a touch of soy sauce.

Swiss Chard is also known as "Perpetual Spinach," and our **Rainbow Swiss Chard** has certainly been growing well in the hot weather. Chard always tastes nice in a quick sauté – separate the leaves from the stems, and cook the stems for about three extra minutes.

Swiss chard Burritos

1 bunch Swiss chard
1 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
1/2 cup finely chopped onions
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup salsa
Burrito tortillas

Chop Swiss chard stems and sauté with onions and garlic in a little olive oil until onions are translucent. Add balsamic vinegar, chard leaves, and salsa, simmering until the leaves wilt. Wrap in tortillas and enjoy.

We harvested a nice crop of **Arugula** this week, thanks, I think, to the continuing relatively cool nights. A peppery salad green from Italy, arugula makes a nice addition to salad, but I think there is no higher use than the following recipe:

Grilled Steaks with Arugula Salad

2 Tbsp fresh lemon juice

Onion harvest started in earnest this week. Onions are very sensitive to daylength, and go dormant when they get the right environmental cues. This is all based extent of the soil moisture on the steppes of Russia, where the onion originated. When the moisture begins to run out, the onion kills off its leaves, eliminating moisture loss through respiration as well as creating a dry protective layer. After the winter snows, the bulb will shoot up a flower stalk in the hopes of making seed before everything goes dry again in late July or early August.

We help the process by breaking over the tops of the onions when a few individuals have started going "tops down", which sends the cue that it's time to dry down and keeps everybody on the same schedule. About a week later, the onions are crated up and moved to the greenhouse, where we have an onion-drying setup. Mesh-bottomed trays are stacked on top of an air-distributing plenum, which is hooked up via a plastic tube to our greenhouse heater. We turn on the heater's fan, which forces air up through the six-foot-high stack of trays to speed the drying process, sealing up the necks and creating a little onion storage package.

2 Tbsp good olive oil
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
4–8 oz steaks
1 ripe tomato, diced
4 oz arugula

Heat your grill as you normally would for steaks. In a large bowl, whisk together the lemon juice, olive oil and garlic. Grill the steaks until done the way you like them, then remove from the grill and set them on individual plates. Add the tomatoes and arugula to the vinaigrette and toss together. Arrange the salad on top of the steaks. The bottom leaves will wilt and infuse the peppery flavor of the arugula into the steaks.

Are those **Sungold Cherry Tomatoes**, or condensed little bubbles of sunshine? When Oliver was young, we often didn't know when the Sungolds were getting ripe, because he would go in the greenhouse and eat the entire ripe crop until they really came into full production and he couldn't possibly keep up with them. The **Round Red Tomatoes** have been delicious as well – we enjoy them most often just sliced and laid on a plate, sprinkled with salt and maybe a little bit of olive oil

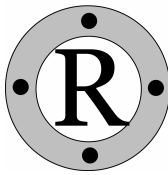
Thai Basil is very similar to regular basil, but with a more pronounced anise note. We often use it interchangeably with the normal, "sweet" basil.

Thai Basil Chicken

2 large chicken breasts
7 cloves garlic
1 bunch Thai basil
small chili peppers (or 2 teaspoons red pepper flakes)
2 tablespoons oil
1/2 teaspoon fish sauce
salt and pepper

Cut chicken into small, even pieces. Stir fry the garlic and pepper (or pepper flakes) in the oil. When the garlic starts to brown, add the chicken. Cook until the chicken is about half done. Add the basil and fish sauce, Stir fry 3 minutes more until chicken is done. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve over rice.

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Eighth Anniversary

This Friday marks the eight anniversary of our move to the farm. In 1999, we went to the bank on the last Friday in July and signed the mortgage. It being the first day of Decorah's annual Nordic Fest, we were unable to acquire a U-Haul truck, so we borrowed our banker's pickup truck and trailer and began pulling load after load of stuff from the house friends had generously shared with us on the opposite side of the county. It was hot – and not just a little bit hot, but record-setting hot and humid, the sort of weather that leaves you soaked with sweat the moment you step out of doors – the sort of weather when you could almost fry an egg on the sidewalk. The sort of weather when, if you grab hold of a loose edge of wallpaper and start to pull, the wallpaper just peels off. Which we did in the abandoned 150-year-old farmhouse we moved into, where the “decorative” wallpaper strip in the kitchen – depicting cartoon character farm animals – covered wall, doors, and refrigerator.

Kim's mom and stepdad came with their weedwhip and opened up a path to the front door of the house, then took the kids to Nordic Fest while we painted the kitchen, pulled up the green shag carpeting in the bedroom to reveal gorgeous hardwood floors, and swept up the mouse leavings. We continued to make trips back and forth to our friends' house, loading the truck and trailer up high, packing the minivan full, fighting the Nordic Fest traffic, then pulling into one door of the drive-through barn, offloading everything, and pulling out the other side. (Eight years later, we are still moving stuff from the barn to the house).

One corner of the house was held up by a scissors jack, like you would use to change the tire on a Honda Civic. Most of the windows had been broken. The cow shed was so unstable that we wouldn't let the kids play in it. The granary was chock full of junk. The barn hadn't been cleaned out in I don't know how long. The two chicken houses lacked roofs, and a tree grew out of one of them. And everything that wasn't planted to corn was, more or less, covered in thistles.

We bought a Farmall 504 tractor that was older than eight of us, a blade for clearing snow from our long driveway, and a rototiller to go on the tractor. We bought a new furnace (the old one was missing), a new water heater (the old one was broken), a new refrigerator (the old one was broken), and a new cookstove (the old one was missing). We mowed the pasture ahead of the portable chicken pens with a scythe, and carried water to the birds in five gallon pails. Four of them. Twice a day. Five hundred feet from the faucet on the house.

But, we made due, especially with some help from our friends and neighbors.

Eric, who still does the occasional bit of field work and baling for us, agreed to take his corn crop off of one field early, so we were able to build two greenhouses that first fall. He also baled up some of the bromegrass from two expired CRP fields, providing bedding for the laying hens and mulch for the garlic. I'm not quite certain if he knew what to make of us then.

Keith, who rents the farm next door to ours, repaired the pasture fence so his sheep stopped coming to visit.

Jim, who went to school with Keith in the old one-room schoolhouse and is now retired, filled us in on the history, gave me my first lesson in tractor repair (it's either the gas or the spark!), lent us a drill press for modifying our greenhouse, and brought his tractor down to mow some of the thistles.

Our farm management group provided feedback on seeding the upper fields to pasture, and helped us build one of the greenhouses. When they left, two of the women left in tears, because of how much work we had ahead of us, and how little chance they thought we had of succeeding. (I only found this out last year. If I had known before then, maybe I would have been too scared to try!)

Friends from Decorah cheerfully helped us cover the greenhouses, even though the second one got covered as snow storm blew in the day after Thanksgiving. Nobody complained. A contractor friend got us a good deal on some new windows, and helped us put them in for free. We installed a new woodstove, and our banker brought us a pickup-truck load of firewood. For free. Another friend asked what we needed to really get this whole Rock-Spring-Farm thing off the ground, and when we said we needed a logo and not to have to send somebody to work in town, he and his wife bought seven years of CSA shares for their employees and came to us with the Circle R logo we still use today.

Somebody told Kim at the time to take a careful look around, and take lots of pictures, because we'd be surprised at what we could get done in just a couple of years. People who've come to visit this year say they hardly recognize the place. Our neighbor, Jim, told us this spring that everybody's really proud of what we've accomplished here, turning this abandoned farm into something full of life and energy, and I told him that we couldn't have done it without the help of people like him, and everybody else who pitched in to make it all work.

Summer Vegetable Share

Thai Basil
Fresh Red Onions
Salad Mix
Rainbow Swiss Chard
Spinruts
Sungold Cherry Tomatoes
Round Red Tomatoes
Golden Zucchini
Rocambole Garlic
Arugula

Salad Share

Salad Mix
Spinruts (White Spring Turnips)
Round Red Tomatoes
Rocambole Garlic
Arugula

This week we stopped work on the farm to read the new Harry Potter book. Okay, not really, but Chris did stay up late with it and had a good time. Oliver and Zane went off to soccer camp at Luther College. We've decided to rent some additional bottomland a couple of miles away to grow crops next year, so Chris spent a fair bit of time down there mowing, and will finish tilling to start a fallow and cover crop cycle this weekend. We continued with the cycle of weeding and planting, including transplanting our final crop of broccoli on Thursday.

Some members of the Lakewinds Natural Foods Board of Directors came for a visit on Monday, along with their general manager and Minnesota Department of Ag's Meg Moynihan, one of my favorite people in the world. The group included CSA member John De Paolis of Country Choice Organic, who generously brought us cookies and oatmeal (Isabel loves their Steel Cut Oats). We had a very enjoyable farm tour, including wide ranging discussions about food safety, the domestic fair trade movement, and what sets the food co-ops apart from conventional grocers now that everybody is hopping on the organic and local (usually organic *or* local) bandwagon, since the co-ops have been supporting us organic *and* local types for quite sometime. We generated lots of good newsletter fodder, which you'll read about soon.