



# News from the Farm



Volume 3, Issue 2  
June 29, 2011

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Monroe, Wisconsin

## How Do We Grow Vegetables for More than 40 Families on Just 5 Acres?

ACTUALLY, the number of families we supply vegetables to is closer to 200, including our market sales. In fact, as an element of our planning, we rotate crops through our the season so, at any one time, only about 3 acres are planted in crops. We also manage 1 1/2 acres of apple orchard and about 33 1/2 acres of pasture.

A lot of thought and planning goes into the plan for the market garden every year. We actively seek requests from you, our members, and our Farmer's Market customers for items that we do not already grow. We also keep an eye on new varieties that are being tested in the market. Based on prior years sales, Lindsey makes sales projections for the next year for each and every variety.

In November of each year we start receiving seed catalogs and by mid-December we have placed our orders. Early orders mean we are much more likely to re-

ceive hard to find/short supply seeds. Seeds start arriving in January.

Then the field plans are made. The location and space for each crop is mapped out. A number of factors go into putting the pieces of this puzzle together. What was in that space the previous year? What kind of soil is in the space? Is the vegetable a good companion plant? (More on companion planting in another issue.) How far apart should the plants be placed? How wide should the rows be? How much space should be allocated between rows?

By mid-February, Lindsey is busy in the greenhouse, planting the early crops in trays. She is also out in the high tunnel, where we can farm directly in the ground under the protection of the plastic cover, planting the early spring produce that can withstand the chilly temperatures.

With a limited Spring Share program in Madison, we must be ready, despite any crazy weather, to harvest our first produce by mid-May. From seed to harvest for early crops can be as short as 30 days or as long as 75.

We use several other interesting techniques to increase overall yields. Intercropping is the planting of two varieties in a single row. For example, radishes are up and harvested in just 30 days, whereas carrots need 65-75 days, depending on the variety. We intercrop radishes in the carrot rows and pull them long before the carrots get large enough to need the space. When a crop is completed harvested from a space, the bed is turned and allowed to rest for up to a month. Then another crop is planted in the same space.

Using these techniques, last year's combined production topped 1,000 bushels of organic produce!



Hardneck Garlic and spring greens in the market garden.

### Special points of interest:

- How Do We Grow Vegetables for More Than 40 Families on Just 5 Acres?
- What is in your share box this week?
- The Gorilla Tree
- Labeling Food as Certified Organic
- Featured Produce and Recipes

## What is in your share box this week?

Sugar Snap Peas  
Lettuce heads  
Arugula bunch  
Spinach  
Beets  
Oregano  
Heirloom Carrots

Garlic Chives  
Lacinato (Dinosaur) Kale \*

### Notes and Comments:

**Sugar Snap Peas:** Will keep in a moist plastic bag in the crisper for up to a week. Can eat raw or cooked.

**Arugula** is sensitive to exces-

sive cold and moisture, with a "shelf life" of just 2 or 3 days when held in a crisper drawer.

**Lacinato Kale:** Will keep up to a week in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer. Wash just before using for better results.

\*Our featured item this week



"Dinosaurs" in the garden?

## The Gorilla Tree

*Second in a series of articles about trees on Grassroots Farm. Primarily pasture, our farm property has few trees, but those that we have all have developed character in some way.*

The market garden is in the bottom of a dish-shaped hollow for which our road was named (Dutch Hollow Road). So all views from the garden are “up”. Along the east property line, in the row of trees along the fence, is the Gorilla Tree.

When we first started farming the property in 2009, the Gorilla Tree became

sort of a joke. Standing stark against the sky, it looked like a King Kong-sized gorilla with enormous arms extended up in a “muscle man” pose.

The tree is actually an ancient White Oak around 100 years old. At its prime, this tree had a conventional shape, like its neighbors, with high crown and side branches that shaded the edge of the pasture. A very long time ago a high wind took the top out of the tree, leaving a couple of side branches that continued to grow into the “muscle man” arms you see in the photo to the right.



## Labeling Foods as “Certified Organic”

THE Organic Foods Production Act and the National Organic Program are in place to assure you, the consumer, of products that are compliant with national organic standards.

Every producer with more than \$5,000 in sales of food products MUST complete a comprehensive inspection of their practices every year to be able to label their products with the USDA Certified Organic logo and to use the logo for the certifying agency on their product and in their advertising.

A producer may not use the word “organic” or the phrase

“certified organic” if they do not pass this inspection. Those producers who use at least 70% organic ingredients with the balance non-organic ingredients may state “made with organic ingredients.” If the product is less than 70% organic ingredients, then the word organic may be used to designate specific ingredients only.

It takes a little extra time to read the label, but in the interest of assuring yourself of an organic product, the time is well spent.

Grassroots Farm, LLC, is certified organic by the Midwest Organic Services Agency.



## Questions and Answers

**Q.** I’ve noticed that some restaurants are advertising their menu as “mostly organic” and “always natural.” Do these terms really have any specific meaning in the eyes of the USDA?

**A.** Restaurants are not monitored by the USDA, but by the local and state departments of health and, therefore, they are not restricted in the same way that producers are in making claims that their offerings are Certified Organic. Most restaurateurs do not deliberately use the term organic unless they can back

up their descriptions with actual Certified Organic ingredients.

Terms such as “natural,” “always natural,” “mostly natural,” and even “local” are not regulated and may be defined by the restaurant in any way they see fit. If you are eating out, don’t assume “local” means within 100 miles or even within 500 miles. Each enterprise has its own idea of what criteria it uses for “local,” so it pays to ask. Likewise, a “natural” food...? I would certainly HOPE all of your food choices are “natural.”



A worm’s eye view in a row of onions. This is where the “action” is! At the surface of the soil and below are the “active ingredients” for plant growth and health. The general soil type at Grassroots Farm is sandy loam. It is rich in fertility and easy to work in.



## Featured Produce— Lacinato Kale

THIS heirloom variety of kale originated in the Tuscany of Italy and has been grown in the region since Roman times and before. Kale is another member of the *brassica* family and counts among its cousins broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower, among many other favorites.

Any and all varieties of kale are considered to be the most nutritious vegetables in the world. Kale contains powerful anti-oxidants, beta-carotene, Vitamins K and C, lutein, and calcium.

Our Lacinato, or Dinosaur, Kale is just one of 5 distinctly different leaf types for kale: Plain leaf (the “boors”), curly leaf, cavolo nero (Dinosaur, Black, or Lacinato), rape leaf, and rape and spear (a cross between plain leaf and

curly). At Grassroots Farm we also grow Red Russian (Red Winterboor) and Green Winterboor varieties.

Dinosaur Kale gets its interesting name from the crinkled texture of its leaf, giving the effect of a scaly dinosaur skin. Lacinato translates to “dinosaur” in English. It has many other regional names, including Blue Kale, Borecole, or Black Kale.

Lacinato Kale lends itself well to both hot and cold methods of preparation. In addition, Kale Chips are THE BEST when made with Lacinato. Just heat oven to 300 degrees, brush kale leaves with olive oil and dust with sea salt. Bake on a cookie sheet for about 20 minutes or until crisp.



## Kale Italian Style

1 bunch kale, stems removed and leaves coarsely chopped  
 1 clove garlic, minced  
 1 T. olive oil  
 2 T. balsamic vinegar  
 Salt and ground black pepper to taste

Cook the kale in a large, covered

saucepan over medium-high heat until the leaves wilt. Once the volume of the kale is reduced by half, uncover and stir in the garlic, olive oil and vinegar.

Cook while stirring for 2 more minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste.



## Beans and Greens Soup

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

6 c. chicken broth  
 1 yellow onion, chopped  
 2 cloves garlic, minced  
 2 T. olive oil  
 1 c. chopped fresh spinach, kale, or chard  
 1/4 c. chopped fresh basil, or 2 teaspoons dry  
 1 can (12 ounces) cannellini beans, drained  
 salt and pepper, to taste

grated Parmesan, for garnish

Bring the broth to a simmer in a 4-quart pot. Meanwhile, in a large frying pan, sauté the onion and garlic in the olive oil until translucent. Add the greens and basil and cook until just wilted. Add this to the broth and stir in the beans. Cook another 5 minutes, then season to taste. Serve hot, sprinkled with Parmesan.

### A Word about Freezing Greens

When your precious greens collection is growing faster than you can use it, try freezing for future use in a recipe such as the Beans and Greens Soup (left):

Rinse greens (spinach, kale or chard) well and be certain all sand is removed. Tear greens into large pieces, removing tough stems. Bring a cup of water in the bottom of a 5 qt. soup pot and immediately put the greens into the pot, clap the lid on, count to 30, and drain under cold water. Best to have all utensils staged in advance. Place wilted greens into sip lock freezer bag, press out all the air inside, and freeze. Trapped air inside will encourage ice crystals to form.

## Glazed Baby Beets

Another favorite from last season's recipe collection. If the beets are larger than a ping pong ball, simmer with the fruit juice up to 20 minutes, watching the level of the liquid carefully.

- 20 baby beets, scrubbed
- 2 cups apricot juice \*
- 3 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey

In a large sauté pan, add the beets and the apricot juice. Cover and cook on medium high for 10 minutes. Add the vinegar and honey and cook for another 10 minutes. Pull off of the heat and keep covered for an additional 5 minutes. Sauce should be reduced by 1/2 and slightly thickened.

\*can substitute fresh orange juice



Baby beets... Please don't discard the leaves. They may be prepared like spinach.

## Sugar Snap Peas and Mushrooms

We enjoy sugar snap peas just as they are, crisp and succulent, but this stir-fry is super simple and goes well over rice for a speedy side dish. This recipe works equally well with snow peas, too.

- 1 T. sesame seeds
- 1 T. olive oil
- 1/2 pound Sugar Snap peas
- 4 ounces fresh mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 2 T. teriyaki sauce

In a medium skillet over medium heat,

cook the sesame seeds about 5 minutes, stirring frequently, until lightly browned. Watch carefully, as they can burn quickly. Remove from the pan and set aside.

Heat oil in the skillet over medium high heat. Stir in peas and mushrooms, and cook 3 to 4 minutes, until tender.

Transfer peas and mushrooms to a medium bowl. Toss with sesame seeds and teriyaki sauce, and serve warm.



## Raw Kale Salad

- 1 bunch Lacinato kale
- 2 thin slices country bread, or two handfuls good, homemade coarse bread-crumbs
- 1/2 garlic clove
- 1/4 t. kosher salt, plus a pinch
- 1/4 c. (or small handful) grated pecorino cheese, plus additional for garnish
- 3 T. extra-virgin olive oil, plus additional for garnish
- Freshly squeezed juice of one lemon (scant 1/4 cup)
- 1/8 t. red pepper flakes

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Trim the bottom few inches off the kale stems and discard. Slice the kale into 3/4-inch ribbons. You should have 4 to 5 cups. Place the kale in a large bowl. If using the bread, toast it until golden brown on both sides and dry throughout. Tear into small pieces and pulse in a food processor until the mixture forms coarse crumbs, or crumbs to your liking.

Using a mortar and pestle or a knife,

pound or mince the garlic and 1/4 teaspoon of salt into a paste. Transfer the garlic to a small bowl. Add 1/4 cup cheese, 3 tablespoons oil, lemon juice, pinch of salt, pepper flakes, and black pepper and whisk to combine. Pour the dressing over the kale and toss very well (the dressing will be thick and need lots of tossing to coat the leaves).. Let the salad sit for 5 minutes, then serve topped with the bread crumbs, additional cheese, and a drizzle of oil

