



Down on the Farm Notes: October 6th & 8th, 2009

Hi everyone,

There wasn't only frost on the pumpkin this week—there was snow, too!

Here's what you will find in the basket this week:

- *Spaghetti Squash
- *Onion
- *Peppers
- *Tomatoes
- *Baby leaf lettuce
- *Basil/mint
- *Grapes

The onions, tomatoes, spaghetti squash, and peppers are from Rick at Lattin Farms. The baby leaf lettuce comes from Salisha and NanaDew. The basil and mint are from Salisha, Rick, and NanaDew, and the grapes come from Dan Corcoran.

Did you know?

Apparently, not everyone believes that putting up the harvest is a worthwhile endeavor. The following excerpt is from *High Country News* contributor Jonathan Thompson:

The Cult of Canning Exposed

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"Yes, it is the season of canning, when people obsessed by food prostrate themselves on the altar of the root cellar of yore and "put up" the harvest. Then they brag about it.

"I put up 60 pounds of tomatoes this weekend," one of the followers told me the other day, her voice sticky with self-righteousness. "And today, as soon as I get home, 10 bushels of pears await me!"

I thought about saying, "I made it through 200 pages of *Infinite Jest*, and I think I finally understand the plot." But that would only prompt a reply like, "Oh, is that an heirloom tomato?"

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Last week, the cult came close to home when my wife and mother spent a full day preserving tomatoes and salsa. This worries me. My mother generally avoided the kitchen when I was a kid. When forced to cook, she relied upon Kraft dinners and frozen enchiladas in tinfoil platters. My wife, Wendy, meanwhile, is alarmingly blasé when it comes to food-borne illnesses and ignores "sell by" dates. She probably

figures if she poisons someone, she'll never be expected to cook again, which is fine by her. Still, the two of them forged ahead into the battlefield of boiling water and sterile jars.

Wendy's description of the ordeal was so awful that guilt compelled me to agree to participate in the next session. I wanted to educate myself first, though, and soon discovered that there's lots of lore on the subject. Indeed, there may be more people writing about canning than doing it. The cybersphere has exploded with blogs extolling the virtues of "putting up," and one even advocates a "canvolution."

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Then, in the scariest chapter of one book, I discovered that... [c]anned stuff is a leading cause of botulism, the nerve toxin that can kill you. Tomatoes are especially prone to the bacteria, and so, the book says, one should always add acid to them before putting them up.

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"Couldn't we just freeze these?" I manage to ask, eyeing the pile of tomatoes that we're about to can. I receive a caustic look in return; it's just not the same. And besides, as the manifesto of canning explains: What if the power goes out? No cult is complete without an apocalypse, and the canvolutionary's version of Armageddon includes freezers sans

electricity regurgitating rotten produce. As with all end-of-days scenarios, the canners' version separates the saved -- that is, the people who have put up plenty of green beans and peaches -- from the damned -- those who put up nothing and now must spend eternity, or at least a few minutes a day, wandering the supermarket aisles.

So I throw plenty of bacteria-killing garlic, lime, and chili into the salsa. After the third burn-blister erupts on my hand, I ask myself: Wasn't technology intended to free us so we could spend time doing the things that make us human, like reading or watching reruns of *Battlestar Galactica*? Isn't that why our grandparents gave up home-canning in the first place? Or is it just because canned fruit is merely a slimmer shadow of its former self, not unlike Mickey Rourke?

But five hours after it begins, our canning ritual is complete. I have to admit that the salsa looks beautiful in those jars. And it's going to be tasty come mid-December. I get the canning thing now. And to prove it, all of you canvolutionaries can come try some of the salsa I put up. Don't worry. I sterilized those jars really well. At least I think I did."

(September 29, 2009)

Recípes

Here's a recipe for homemade crackers to go along with autumn's homemade soups and stews. *Tina*

Basic Farmhouse Crackers

1 ½ C flour
1 ½ tsp Cream of tartar
¾ tsp salt
¾ tsp baking soda
¼ C oil; ½ C water
1 egg; 2 tsp sugar
1 tsp balsamic vinegar
¼ C toasted sesame seeds

Combine the first 4 ingredients, mixing well. Add oil and stir until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Add water and stir until a dough forms.

In a small bowl, beat together the egg, sugar, and vinegar.

On a lightly flour-dusted surface, roll the out until very thin. Brush with the egg mixture and sprinkle with sesame seeds.

Cut, tear, or use cookie cutters in shapes you like to make crackers. Place on oiled baking sheet and, depending on thickness, bake 15-20 minutes at 350 degrees.

Roasted Tomato Basil Pesto

2 pre-roasted tomatoes or one large fresh tomato
2-3 cloves peeled garlic
3 tbl. pine nuts
2 tbl. olive oil
1 c. fresh basil leaves
½ c. parmesan cheese
2 tbl. butter, softened
Salt & pepper to taste

Combine the tomatoes, garlic, pine nuts, and oil in a blender and process until just combined. Add a handful of basil and process again briefly; continue adding the basil in small amounts until all is combined. Stir in the parmesan cheese and butter and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add to pasta, pizza, roasted potatoes, omelets, or grilled vegetables—or spaghetti squash!

Note: If you've never cooked spaghetti squash, roast it like any other winter squash. When it's cool enough to handle, scrape out the flesh—it will come out in long strands.

Serve with olive oil, garlic, and parmesan; butter, nutmeg, and a little brown sugar; or try the pesto recipe above. Experiment!