Red Fire Reader

A bimonthly newsletter from Red Fire Farm, growers of healthy organic food for communities in Massachusetts

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Calendar:

July 15th: Ona's cooking demo at the Springfield X Farmers Market/CSA distribution
July 19th : Picnic at Little Hill Field. Weed Walk @ 3:30, Dinner @ 5:30.
July 23rd: Cooking demo at Boston CSA in Jamaica Plain
July 29th: Ona's cooking demo at the Springfield X Farmers Market/CSA distribution
Aug. 23rd : Red Fire Farm Tomato Festival (more info. coming soon!)

In season:

lettuce – summer squash – zucchini – cucumbers – carrots- chard – beets- parsley – dill – basil- peas – radish - cabbage- – radish – broccoli – cilantro– garlic bulbs – walla walla onions – scallions - kale - collards. – Gnhs Tomatoes and Peppers Locally grown Blueberries

Come join us for…

A Picnic in Little Hill Field

Saturday, July 19th

There will be a Weed Walk with John Root through the fields at **3:30pm** and then we will build up the fire to grill your personal kabobs at **5:30pm**. The picnic will also feature salads with all seasonal produce from the farm, local beer from the People's Pint and cold, refreshing lemonade for the kids. There are limited tickets, so get yours today. From all the crew here at Red Fire Farm, we hope to see you there!

Planning the rotation

At this point in the year about 80% of the total field space that we will be planting to vegetable crops is now seeded or transplanted with the vegetable plants. Some of these fields contained the early crops such as the lettuce, radishes and spinach that we harvested during June, and these sections are now ready to be planted with cover crops in order to improve the soil prior to next years growing season. Most of the fields are currently growing the main season summer and fall crops that we are starting to harvest and will continue to harvest this summer and fall. On certain of these crops like cabbage and winter squash we will interseed a cover crop of clover to grow in the under story of the vegetable plants, but for the most part we will be unable to plant a cover crop until September or October after we complete the harvest of each field section. Some sections of the farm fields are still unplanted but, are in the preparation stage which involves mowing, spading and bed forming. These fields will during July and early August be planted to late crops of greens, broccoli, beets and other fast growing crops that we will pick as the weather cools off this fall.

Although it is possible in some cases in our climate to grow more than one vegetable crop on the same section of land in the same season, this is something I generally try to avoid. In the long term, growing continuous vegetables without soil enhancing cover crops as part of the rotation will deplete the soil quality. For this reason I feel that it is better for the land in the long term to grow only one vegetable crop per season on a piece of land, and to use any extra growing window before or after the vegetable crop to grow a soil improving cover crop of one type or another. In fact, I think that cover crops are so important that I attempt to keep 30 -50% of the farms total plantable acreage growing a cover crop all summer long. In other words, only planting vegetable crops on 50-70% of the farms fields each year. This type of rotation if well managed can enhance the soil quality over time and also help manage pests and diseases in the vegetable planting more easily.

During the last few days I have been spending some time sitting at the computer trying to figure out where to plant which crops next year, and based on this, which cover crops to plant in those fields this summer and fall after this years crops get harvested. Currently the farm has about 75 growing blocks that are each about ½ - 1 acre in size. (continued on page 2)

Figuring out how to rotate all the different crops in all of these different growing areas is a very complex project with multiple factors to consider. If find that it takes a massive spread sheet and occasional compromises on some considerations in order to get everything situated to my satisfaction. One thing I have found this year during this process is that we have planted way more acreage than we expected to this season. Due to the demand for CSA shares and organic produce this spring, we allowed our CSA to grow to about 800 shares. This is quite a bit more than the 600 shares that our original crop plans that we made last winter called for. In order to accommodate this last minute increase we ended up increasing the size of many of our vegetable plantings this spring, and to accommodate this we ended up planting vegetables in fields that this season were supposed to be growing only cover crops. Now what we have on our hands is a land shortage. If we are to sustain our current amount of crops and shares next year and in the following years, we really need to add some new fields to our land base.

Next issue of the Reader I will write more about our land situation and our attempts to find more fields by knocking on the doors of our neighbors. -Ryan

Tomato Scare? Not here.

Here at the farm we have been following with interest the most recent food scare in the produce industry. This time around the implicated vegetable is one of our favorites – tomatoes. It seems that people all around the country are freaking out because the industrial food system has again produced food that is getting people sick. The FDA warns that tomatoes grown somewhere in the country has caused salmonella outbreaks. They can't seem to say where these infected tomatoes are originating, but instead supply only a list of states that they are sure are not the culprit. That said, the industrial system of food is so huge, and the produce so untraceable that they can't say where the problem is either. As a result tomatoes are getting tossed and paranoia is rampant. In my opinion it is all because the food system is too centralized. If people knew which farm or even which state their produce was grown, they would easily be able to trace a problem to its source. Instead we have a situation where no one seems to know anything.

Here at Red Fire Farm we know where our tomatoes (and other vegetables) are grown, and they go from the fields to your tables within a matter of hours. We are certain that our produce is as safe as can be to eat, so our suggestion is to leave the industrial food system to suffer its fate, and instead eat local produce from Red Fire Farm and other Massachusetts farms.

Speaking of the tomato season, this is always the time of year when people begin to get anxious for the first ripe field tomatoes. So far we still are picking greenhouse tomatoes in abundance. These we have for sale at our stands and farmers market. At this point we provide only seasonal outdoor grown produce for the CSA, so CSA members can expect to begin getting some field tomatoes by late July we hope, and certainly during August and most of September we should have tons of tomatoes to harvest!

-Ryan

Fruit Shares: Time for something new.

The strawberry season is now over. We expect to be able to provide blueberries for all the fruit shares during most of July. The blueberries are grown locally by River Valley farm in Whately, MA. The farmer Fran uses an integrated pest management approach to managing the pests on his 10 acres of blueberry bushes. This means that they are not organic, but that he minimizes the use of sprays by carefully monitoring the pests and intervening only when absolutely necessary. Fran says that he does not ever need to spray the berries with anything after the fruit forms, so there should be no residue problems on the fruits at all.

PYO UPDATE

-Strawberries are completely done
-Green and yellow beans are now ready.
-Late peas are still ripening. Shell and snap peas are still looking good!
-Flower PYO section now open. Please check weekly stem limit on the PYO board in barn, and bring your own clippers if possible.
-Herbs are abundant including basil, cilantro, dill, parsley, chives and oregano. Please pick as much as you need each week for your cooking needs. Please wait a little longer to make pesto so that the basil plants can grow bigger still!
-There will be a few raspberries for Granby members and others who visit the farm, but the patch is small so don't bother to drive all the way from Boston just for the raspberries.

John and Chanya with their flowers

Greetings from Moon Flower Farm Project

We want to thank all of the flower share members for their patience. The week of July 15 will begin the first bouquet distributions. Don't forget to bring your vase with water to keep your flowers fresh while in transport. If you are unable to or forget your vase simply cut the stems before plunging them into water.

Tips for keeping your flowers fresh…

- Carefully unwrap the flowers and remove any foliage from the stems that would fall below the water line.
- With a sharp knife cut 1 or 2 inches of the stems at a sharp angle under running water.
- Refresh the water at least every other day and re-cut the stems for optimal water uptake.
- Since many flowers are ethylene (a gas produced by ripening fruit) sensitive, be sure to display your flowers away from ripening produce.
- Remove any flowers that are passing by.

More and more flowers are blooming everyday, adding vibrant colors and energy to the fields. CSA and farm stand members are more than welcome to come and pick their own bouquet in the pick your own patch located within the horseshoe of greenhouses.

Since we are growing chemical free flowers, we want to include a couple natural flower preservative recipes:

Cut Flower Preservative Recipe #1
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon sugar
1/2 teaspoon household chlorine bleach or 1 crushed aspirin tablet
1 quart warm water

Cut Flower Preservative Recipe #2
2 tablespoons white vinegar
2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon household chlorine bleach or 1 crushed aspirin tablet
1 quart warm water

Thank you all for your time, we are looking forward to brightening your day.
Local flowers are fresh flowers.
Be well,
Chanya and John of the Moon Flower Farm Project

Farm Cam

The tomato plants keep growing and putting strings up between the stakes so that they don't flop over is a never ending job. It makes for happy tomato plants and with all the hot weather we've had lately, there are a few ripe tomatoes already. The peppers are also getting large and this field will be colorful in time for the picnic.

The Red Fire Reader is compiled and edited by Ona Lindauer, the Red Fire Farm culinary intern. Newsletter topic ideas, recipes, writings, poems, and CSA community announcements are welcome and should be submitted to redfirefarm@gmail.com .

THE RESULTS ARE IN

We had some great name submissions, and the winning name is…

Marshmallow.

Thanks to everyone who put in a name and don't forget to say hello to Marshmallow when you visit the farm.

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