Red Fire Reader

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

GRANBY, MASSACHUSETTS 01033 (413) 467-SOIL JULY 5TH, 2010 ISSUE NUMBER II

A NEW ADDITION TO THE PYO PATCH—EDIBLE FLOWERS!

IN THIS ISSUE

CALENDAR:

July 6th: Ona's cooking demo at the Granby CSA
July 16th: Ona's cooking demo at the Brighton CSA
July 18th : Farm Tour and hike in Montague 1PM
July 20th: Ona's cooking demo at the Springfield X Farmers Market/CSA distribution.
July 28th : Ona's cooking demo at the Somerville CSA

IN SEASON IN JULY

basil~lettuce ~ radishes ~ beets ~carrots ~ kale ~ mesclun greens ~ cilantro ~ garlic ~ herbs ~ onions ~ potatoes ~ cabbage ~ basil~ summer squash ~ cucumbers ~ beans ~ melons~onions ~ sweet corn ~ blueberries

FROM THE GREENHOUSE

~ peppers ~ cherry tomatoes ~ tomatoes~

Red Fire Farm prepares to farm land in Montague.

Come to our hike and tour of the new farm on July 18th.

As many of you know Red Fire Farm has purchased 45 new acres of farm land, farm buildings, greenhouses and 70 acres of forest land all located in the Montague Meadows in southern Montague. We are now taking the first steps in preparing this land for organic vegetable and berry growing (i.e. growing soil improving cover crops), and also beginning to contemplate in earnest the opportunity that this land represents for the farm, and also the complications and challenges involved in successfully transitioning some of our crops onto this land.

To understand Red Fire Farm's need to acquire this land in the first place, you have to understand something about my philosophy toward growing food. Basically I think that if a crop can be grown in our climate, and if it is something that is tasty and delicious to eat, then as a produce farm, I feel it is our responsibility to be growing each of these items in the abundance that people want to eat them. I also think that it is important to rotate the fields and grow soil improving cover crops on the land every few seasons instead of vegetable crops which can over time be hard on the soil health. This has caused us to need more and more land during the last few seasons as we have grown the scale of our membership. So in general we need more land in order to do a good and reliable job of growing the crops that we all want to eat. Combine with this the fact that 75% of our Granby crop land is rented, and several important fields also are not even permanently protected from development, and we have a vulnerable situation for the farm's ability to reliably continue growing the desired crops in the quantity that we need to.

Having tried (so far without success) to achieve long term security on the rented Granby fields, and also having scoured our neighborhood in Granby to try to find more farm land that we might be able to acquire (much of the good farm land around Granby unfortunately has already been made into houses and lawns), we decided our best strategy to get an adequate land base for the farm would be to establish a second farm yard in a different town. Finding good farm land anywhere is a hard thing to do and to afford, so we are delighted that we found the beautiful farm for sale in Montague which consists of some of the best soils that exist for vegetable farming anywhere in the world. So far we have successfully convinced the bank to loan us the $700,000 that we needed to purchase the Montague properties, but now the real hard part begins of figuring out how to split our Granby farm into two farms, and do this all in an efficient way that allows us to keep our sanity and still make enough money to pay back the bank on the required schedule.

Two farms mean some real opportunities. We will have space to grow some of the crops that thus far we have been unable to fit into our Granby fields in adequate quantity. Asparagus, Blueberries, Raspberries, more Sweet Corn, more Winter Squash and more Storage Roots and Winter Greens (so that we can all continue eating local all winter) are some of the crops in particular that come to mind which we are looking forward to growing more of. Two farms also mean some real challenges. We will need two complete sets of tractors and farm equipment, we will need another packing area and coolers at the Montague farm yard, and most importantly

we will need another set of farmers and managers to keep on top of all these management and labor intensive crops. Our delivery of produce between the two farm yards will also need some careful coordination if we are to make sure we have the right produce at the right place each day. We are excited about all of this, but we are also nervous. Currently our vegetables are all growing in Granby, and already Sarah and I feel our time is stretched so thin and our stress levels so high that on some days we are going out of our minds. Nevertheless, despite the grumbling and complaining about the whether that is common among farmers, at heart most farmers are forever optimists. Otherwise we would not have the heart to take the risks that we do each spring when we start planting all those seeds. I believe that doing more organic farming is a good thing for the world, and I have faith that with the help of Red Fire Farm's dedicated staff, I will in the long term be glad that we have taken the risk to create a second Red Fire Farm in Montague. I also have faith that we will be able to figure out how to do this all in such a way that Sarah and I don't burn our selves out on the whole idea of farming in general.

Please come and join us in Montague for a guided tour and hike of the Montague farm on **July 18th** starting at **1PM**. We will tell you more about our plans! -Ryan

TOMATO CROP UPDATE:

Last season Red Fire Farm lost about 75% of our field tomato crop to a devastating fungus disease called Late Blight. Although so far the weather this season has not been such that it is promoting the spread of this disease, there is still an elevated risk of a repeat disease outbreak. Based on recommendations from Umass extension we are applying an organic approved copper fungicide material to our tomato fields in order to try to prevent widespread damage from this disease this season. Below are some excerpts from a Umass article about tomatoes, copper and the management of late blight. We hope that you all agree with our decision to carefully use copper in the management of our tomato crops this season.

-Ryan

Copper Fungicides for Organic Farms

(exerpts from "Vegetable Notes" June 24th, 2010; R. Hazzard and A. Cavanagh)

Late blight has not been reported in Massachusetts at this time, but it has showed up in isolated spots already this year with reported cases in MD, CT, FL, NY, LA, KY, and PA. Given the widespread epidemic in the Northeast last season, the likelihood that infected over wintered potato tubers will grow new infected plant tissue somewhere in Massachusetts is a fairly high. Now is the time to make decisions about how to handle the disease if and when it shows up in our area. Conventional growers have access to fungicides that can effectively slow or control the disease. Organic growers have more limited options.

The only material available to organic growers that has proven effective in preventing late blight is copper. Despite being 'organic' and less toxic than many conventional materials, copper is not without its dangers. Organic growers who sell primarily to retail or wholesale markets may feel that they have no choice but to do what is necessary to try to save their crop in order to recoup their investment. Organic CSA's have a different set of considerations and may find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, shareholders may not want anything sprayed on their produce, no matter how benign. On the other hand, shareholders will be very disappointed if there are no tomatoes, which is almost certain to be the result if we see late blight show up here early in the year again and copper isn't applied preventively on a regular schedule. Even more importantly, if we do see late blight this year and crops are not treated preventively or destroyed at the first sign of infection, they will become reservoirs of disease and serve to prolong and worsen the epidemic and will contribute to crop losses and increased fungicide use at other farms.

Copper has no curative value, and once an infection is established in your fields spraying copper will do little to slow it's spread. The time to decide whether and how to spray copper is now, before we see the disease in our local fields. Using copper will also reduce incidence of other tomato diseases such as early blight, Septoria leaf spot, and bacterial diseases.

The sprayer set up to spray copper on tomatoes

One copper product that is allowed in certified organic production is registered in Massachusetts: NuCop 50WP. Copper hydroxide is the active ingredient. Copper fungicides are protectants, so they MUST be applied to the foliage before infection.

The copper ion is absorbed by the germinating spore, and the copper denatures spore proteins and kills the fungus before it infects the plant. Once infection of the tissue has occurred, copper has no effect on the growth of existing lesions in foliage or stems. In other words, once you can see the disease it's too late for copper to control it, at least on that plant.

(Copper Fungicides for Organic Farms continued)

Human health hazards:

Read the label and follow directions for personal protective equipment, mixing and handling, restricted entry period, and days to harvest. Skin and especially eye exposure is the most serious risk associated with using copper hydroxide. The greatest health risk is to the person who mixes and sprays the material. Proper protective equipment should be worn when handling or applying any pesticide or fertilizer.

Copper can be an excellent tool in times when there is really no other way to save a crop. It can be dangerous and is not a tool to be taken lightly, but when applied carefully and correctly it has minimal danger to the applicator or the environment.

Copper will not save an infected field, but if we see another late blight epidemic like last year's it may make the difference between acceptable yields and no crop at all.

--R. Hazzard, A. Cavanagh. Sources: Brady, Nature and Property of Soils; A. Barker, Dept PSIS, UMass, Mineral Nutrition and Plant Disease by L Datnoff, W. Elmer, D. Hubner

These tunnels, when covered with plastic, keep most of the water and the water born molds, like Late Blight, off the tomato foliage. These tomatoes will be in better shape if we get the wet weather this season that led to the Late Blight outbreak last season.

Preserving Produce for Winter

Good produce is best fresh, but it is never too early to start planning for the dark days of winter by setting aside some of summer's bounty and preserving it. There are many ways that you can preserve your extra produce or even buy in more produce in bulk to preserve. Go in on a half bushel of cukes with a few friends and have a Pickle Party! With the diversity of Red Fire Farm crops, the notes on preserving could go on and on, but here are some basic pointers.

Canning

This is the tried and true method for preserving but it takes a little more care—and a pressure cooker if you've got access to one (if not, a large pot for a water bath does the trick for high-acid produce. Check this website for information on canning both in a water bath and pressure cooker as well as canning jams and jellies: www.pickyourown.org/allaboutcanning.htm You can also make pickles-- see recipes below. These can be sealed with the water-bath method since the addition of vinegar will make any vegetable acidic. There are also pickle recipes that go straight in the freezer or refrigerator.

Freezing

If you have space in your freezer, this is the easiest method and works well for most produce. Fruit, peppers (sliced with seeds removed), corn (off the cob), even whole tomatoes can be frozen in Ziploc bags. Freeze items on a cookie tray and transfer to a bag to keep items from freezing together. Check out this Freezing Preparation Chart for details on each vegetable: http://ourgardengang.tripod.com/bmfreezeprep.htm

Drying

This method saves space. Tomatoes, herbs, fruit, even zucchini can be dried and eaten as a snack (zucchini chips) or in recipes (sun dried tomatoes). Blanch the produce first to stop enzyme activity, then if you don't know anyone with a dehydrator, the oven can be used or a sunny, hot, dry spot to dry the vegetables until crisp and brittle. Dry produce on a screen, rather than a tray to improve air flow around the sliced vegetables. This is a helpful website: www.recipes4us.co.uk/cooking/Drying%20Food.htm.

Fermenting

This last option is for the adventurous eater. Lactobacillii, which are on all produce to begin with, can break down the starches and sugars in the produce and create lactic acid, which acts as the vinegar in these pickles. Saurkraut, kim chee, and even many cheeses used to be made strictly by lacto-fermentation. This preservation process also makes the produce even better for you by increasing its digestability and nutrient availability. See the recipe below and also check out Wild Fermentaion by Sandor Katz and Nourishing Traditions by Sally Falon for more informaiton on the benefits of lacto-fermentation and more recipes.

BULK ITEMS AVAILABLE:

CUCUMBERS - $35 per half bushel (about 20 lbs)
DILL - $1.50 per bunch
GARLIC - $1.50 per head
GRAPE LEAVES - $1.50 for 10 leaves (for use in fermented pickles)
BASIL - $7.00 per LB
SUMMER SQUASH/ZUCCHINI - $35 per half bushel (about 20 lbs)
BEANS - $40 per 25lb box
BLUEBERRIES - $40 per flat of 12 pints, grown with Integrated Pest Management (not organic)

Local organic flowers for events and celebrations. We can do flowers in bulk that you arrange, or bouquets of flowers. See the website for this season's flower selection by color. To set up a flower order, please contact us at wholesale@redfirefarm.com.

PYO Crops for July:

Depending on the weather we expect **pea** picking to continue into July for a week or two. There are currently plenty of snow, snap and shell peas for picking. By the 1st or 2nd week in July the first **beans** will begin ripening. We have succession plantings of green and yellow beans, so there should be a good supply all summer at least into September. Check the PYO chalk board for bean picking limits once they begin ripening. In addition to the PYO beans we will be including beans in the shares that are grown organically by another valley farmer and picked with a bean picking machine. Also ready for picking in July will be the **first of the cut flowers**. **Herbs of various types** will continue all month, and the **first cherry tomatoes** may begin to ripen for limited picking by late July.

SAUERKRAUT

This recipe can be scaled up to whatever size batch you want to make.

Cabbage
Salt
Caraway seed

Remove the core and grate the cabbage. In a large bowl, mix with salt (1-2 tsp. per pound) and caraway seed and pound with something clean and hard to start breaking down the cell walls and help release the cabbage juices. Pack into a wide-mouthed crock or food grade plastic bucket. Remember that when packed, the kraut with take up half the space of the cabbage in the bowl, so get the right sized container. As you pack the cabbage in, tamp it down tightly with the same pounding implement from before—this helps get all the air out so that only cabbage juices are between the bits of cabbage in the crock. Place a cover on the top of the cabbage if you have something of the right size or just weight—something that will press down on the cabbage enough so the liquids cover the cabbage. Let sit for a week in the summer (longer in the winter), checking daily that the juices cover the cabbage and skimming off any scum. Move to a cooler spot like the basement to slow the fermentation or the refrigerator if you like the taste and texture of the kraut and want to halt fermentation. Enjoy!

Dill Pickles

8 pounds small pickling cucumbers
4 cups vinegar
12 cups water
2/3 cup kosher salt
1 bunch fresh dill stalks
2 bulbs garlic, cloves separated and peeled
1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns

Soak cukes in an ice bath for at least 2 hours either whole or as spears. Sanitize wide-mouthed quart jars and lids in a large pot of boiling water for 10 min. In another pot, heat the brine (vinegar, salt, water) to a rapid boil. Place a sprig of dill and a clove or garlic at the bottom of each jar, pack with as many cucumbers as possible, another garlic clove, and fill with hot brine to ¼" from the top. Process jars in a boiling water bath for 15 min. Make sure they are sealed properly when cooled. Will keep up to 2 years in a cool dry place.

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 thefarmers@redfirefarm.com.

RED FIRE FARM
7 CARVER STREET
GRANBY, MA 01033
(413) 467-SOIL
thefarmers@redfirefarm.com

RED FIRE FARM
Organic Produce, Plants & Flowers

VISIT US ONLINE!
www.redfirefarm.com