



Weekly News

Timing is everything ~ Michele Roy

This week we start the first of many transitions in the greenhouse, switching between early greens to the heat-loving tomatoes, cukes, and peppers.

The delicious spinach you all received last week came out of the greenhouse. Every year it's a trick to plant it at the right time so it's not too big or too little for the first CSA week. Plant too late and it's not big enough, plant too early and it's too big or worse, begins to bolt (go quickly to the flowering stage) and get bitter. Having the greenhouse allows us to plant extra-early (while the snow is still on the ground!) but it also means that the maturity dates listed for vegetables are meaningless—things generally take quite a lot longer when you plant them on April 10, which is when the spinach went into the greenhouse beds. All things considered, we were pleased with this year's timing.

Two major problems with getting spring-planted spinach to grow well are day length and heat. While heat is usually thought of as the main cause of bolting, day length actually initiates this flowering response in spinach. Flowering in most varieties used in North America is "switched on" by days about 14 hours long. We hit the 14 hour day-length mark back on April 26; we're up to 15 hrs. and 26 minutes now. (The solstice on June 21st is 15 hrs. 31 minutes -and 44 seconds.)

By the time warm spring weather arrives and the spinach is growing nicely, the days have become long enough to initiate flowering. Recent days above 80° F sped up the plants' metabolism and rate of bolting, so we clear-cut the spinach beds last week to make way for the tomatoes. We'll plant more in late August-early September for a fall har-



Spinach, ready to bolt.

vest—the tricky part for that is that spinach doesn't germinate well in heat! No one said this gardening stuff was easy—but it sure is interesting!

Anna got the *Diva* cucumbers transplanted into one of the old spinach beds today (Sunday 6/7), and we'll put a row of short-vine tomatoes in the other spinach bed early this week. As we empty the beet and carrot greenhouse beds, more tomatoes and peppers will take their places. Come and see!

Pick some mint in the garden this week!

Mint for the picking ~ Anna Smith

Mint – *Mentha spicata*

Mint, an herb named after Minthe, the nymph from ancient Greek mythology who was turned into mint, the plant, by a jealous Persephone, is perhaps one of the most commonly known and widely used culinary and medicinal herbs in North America. It grows to be 18-24 inches tall and has beautiful tiny light purple flowers when in bloom.

Mint is notorious for taking over gardens, so if you do not want your mint to spread you may consider keeping it in pots. Mint likes to grow in moist soil and full sun to partial shade. It can be susceptible to rust, a disease that causes the leaves to brown and the plant to die off.

Mint has many different uses – it is a mild nervine stimulant, meaning that it can provide a “pick-me-up” when drunk as tea or smelled; it is useful in bringing down fevers, especially when



Please take advantage of the mint, our first-up pick-your-own herb. Cilantro, dill, and basil will be ready soon; flowers and cherry tomatoes will be available too.

combined with yarrow and elder in an old Gypsy tea popularized here by herbalist Rosemary Gladstar. Mint can be useful in warding off heartburn if a tea is drunk half an hour before and after meal times. Its astringent qualities can be helpful in clearing up skin

blemishes when used as a facial steam (simply chop up some mint into a bowl, pour boiling water over it, and hold your face above with a towel covering both your head and the bowl.)

As I write this, I am soaking my feet in hot water with Epsom salt and mint picked fresh from the garden. Epsom salt is nice for relieving sore and achy muscles and joints while the mint reenergizes feet worn out from being crammed into rubber work boots all week.

Who's the boss? It depends ~by Denis Thoet

A couple of weeks ago, our angular octogenarian plumber Oliver Larrabee ambled up the driveway and asked Michele, "Where's the boss?"

She replied, "That's me," and proceeded to tell him exactly what she needed to have him do to bring water to the inside and outside wash stations in the apprentice house. Three hours and \$500 later, we had running water there for the first time. No more running leaky hoses from the main house down the driveway to wash our veggies on share days.

Michele is not only the boss of the farm plumbing but the entire irrigation system. She's also in charge of planning the garden, ordering seeds (over 125 varieties of 30 different vegetables), mapping the garden for rotations and successions, scheduling plantings, transplantings, and final disposition into the garden.

She also runs the daily and weekly game plan for most of the work we do from March to November, and handles all the finances, bookkeeping, and farm records. That's why she often gets up at 3:30 a.m. to start her day, and worries not a little when there is not enough rain, or too much rain or when

things are not going exactly right for one reason or another.

Besides providing some of the brute labor for all the things Michele needs to have done, I get to be the boss of a few things too.

Like pasture fencing and firewood, and shared bossism over livestock management (with Anna), and carpentry projects (with Michele and Anna). Admittedly, it's a short list but it fairly describes my capabilities.

Anna, in her first full year on the farm, has taken over responsibility for flowers and herbs.

Being the boss is not always that much fun. For example, if the animals (chickens, goats, sheep) get out of their fences, it's pretty much my fault, although I do my best to blame the animals. Out of firewood? Blame the weather or the stove.

Or if there is a crop failure whether from weather or insects, Michele takes it harder than the rest of us.

But when things work out, as they usually do, it's nice to be the one in charge, or to be on very friendly terms with the one who is.



We point fingers with a smile at Long Meadow Farm.

Technique of the week: **Herbal infusion**

"Infusion" is really just a fancy way of saying "tea." However, there are some ways to make a cup of tea better. Deb Soule, founder of Avena Botanicals says that her favorite method for making tea is to put herbs in a pot of cold water with a lid on them and very slowly raise the temperature to just below a simmer. Keeping the lid on helps to keep the volatile oils (a.k.a. essential oils) in the tea. Over the past few years I have moved away from individual cups of tea and now brew up a big pot at a time to enjoy, often adding additional herbs and water throughout the day. One article I was reading recently about mint suggests that you only allow it to steep 3-10 minutes, as steeping longer than that can cause the flavor of the tea to be altered.

Another way of making infusions that I personally enjoy is to put your herbs of choice in a lidded glass jar full of water and to leave the jar either in the sun or out in the moonlight, especially on full moons. Maybe it's just my imagination, but I think you can feel a difference when you drink it.

There is quite a bit of mint available for picking in the herb garden along the driveway. Just look for the sign. When cutting it, cut off right above a new set of leaves growing on the stem. Try adding it to ice cream, lemonade, mixed drinks (mojitots and juleps? Yum.), and other cooling summer treats.

Enjoy!



Picking the spinach early in the morning. There are six 80-ft. beds in the greenhouse. The 2 on the left are spinach. Bed #3 is carrots, #4 is beets, #5 more beets, and #6 carrots. There are flats of cabbage and Brussels sprouts awaiting transplanting to the far right. After the spinach beds were clear-cut last Thursday we moved many flats of tomato, pepper, and cucumber seedlings onto them. This week we'll put them into the ground. Be sure to explore the greenhouse and gardens every week when you come for your vegetables—there is always something new to see!