

Hog's Back Almanac



Week 16 September 20, 2012

What's in the box and where does it go?

	Fridge?	Bag?	Notes & Varieties
Beets	Yes	Plastic	Gold w/tops
Broccoli	Yes	Plastic	
Cabbage	Yes	Plastic	Green
Garlic	No	No	
Parsley	Yes	Plastic	Italian
Peppers	Yes	Plastic	Carmens and serranos
Potatoes	No	Paper	Mixed
Shell Beans	Yes	Yes	Taylor Horticultural
Spinach	Yes	Plastic	
Tomatoes	No	No	Last of them?
Winter Squash	No	No	Acorn and sugar dumpling

Squash

The first squash of the season are in the box this week. I mentioned last week that we'd usually start with the squash a week ago, but due to tremendous pest pressure in the squash this year it has made me hold off for a week. In a normal year (whatever that is) cucumber beetles and squash bugs do damage to the growing plant and generally leave the actual squash alone. This year saw such huge numbers of cucumber beetles that they have been everywhere, even in our house. The cucumber beetle eats the plants, which is damaging, but more importantly it is a 'vector' or insect carrier of several different diseases that can infect the plants. The most common is squash mosaic virus, and we've seen plenty of that over the course of this year.

The acorn squash were hardest hit by damage since they were in the same field as the cucumbers and zucchini, which are typically early-season favorite haunts of the beetles. Many of the acorn squash rotted before they were even harvested. What seemed fine in the field has not held up very well in after we brought it in to the packing shed. We've cut open a couple in the house that were not quite right, but looked just fine. I couldn't quite bring myself to compost all 400 of the acorn squash, so we're sending the best looking ones in with the warning that they may have issues. I guess my

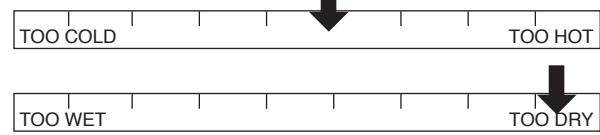
Farm Report 9/20/12

Rainfall 0.26"

High Temperature 86°

Low Temperature 36°

Farmer Complaint Indicators™:



advice would be to plan one meal with all three of the squash, so that if you do get a funky one, it's not going to ruin your night. How will you know it's funky? If you cut it open and it smells like booze, it's bad.

The sugar dumpling seem somewhat less affected by disease issues. The other problem that cucumber beetles can cause is that when the plants die back in the fall and their food source goes away they will sometimes feed on the tender skins of some varieties of squash. Sugar dumpling, delicata and buttercup have been ravaged in the field by this. There will be less of all of these than normal, but the bright light has been the butternut which doesn't seem to appeal to the beetles very much, and are looking great. Yet one more reason to not put all of your squash eggs in one basket.

Let's all hope for a real winter this year to keep some of these problems in check.

Green cabbage is in the box this week. This is a new variety for us called Charmant, let me know what you think. I haven't tried any yet, but it sure looked nice in the field. The variety we had been growing for years, Gonzales, was just too prone to splitting in the field. You've got plenty of time to use this baby up, it will keep well in your crisper drawer for weeks.

A good-sized bag of shell beans is in the box this week. This will be the last beans of the year. Usually I plant a variety called Tongue of Fire, but the seed for it was nowhere to be found this year. Shell beans are sometimes referred to as horticultural beans and that's where this one gets its name, Taylor Horticultural. Thanks to member Ellie for coming out yesterday and helping to pick 350 pounds of them! A recipe for them follows.

Gold beets are near the top of my list of perfect looking vegetables. The deep green of the leaves, the almost chartreuse color of the stems and the rich yellow-gold of the beet are almost a perfect combination. Someday I'm going to paint my office this family of colors, or maybe the exterior of our house. The tops of these are one of our favorite cooking greens and the beets are sweet, mild and don't stain whatever you cook them with.

Tomatoes and peppers are winding down significantly this week. Just a couple of each, except for the hot serranos which are still plentiful in the field. We managed to avoid a frost on Monday night in the fields so if we make it through this weekend without frost we will certainly have more peppers if not a tomato.

A mix of potatoes in the box again this week. I like to cut the different varieties up in a 1/2-inch dice and roast them together with some herbs for a nice side dish.

The fall broccoli continues with another head this week, and more on the way. Parsley, garlic and spinach round out the box this week.

Farm News

How dry is it at the farm? It's so dry that the neighbor's cows are giving evaporated milk. We haven't received a one-inch rainfall since June 21st. Since July 1st we've received a grand total of 5.02 inches of rain, and September is turning into the driest month yet, with only 0.44 inches of rain thus far.

Apart from the dryness things are looking pretty good around the farm. A brush with frost Monday night was uneventful. When I got up it was 36° at the house which made me a bit nervous so I headed out with my flashlight to see if there was any frost in the field. I found a few patches right close to the ground out of the wind, but for the most part the fields were free of any of the white stuff. When I took the kids to school an hour later there was quite a bit of frost down in the valley.

Cleanup continues at the farm as we start to harvest the main crop of winter squash from the fields and get things cleaned up. Irrigation also continues whenever possible, although the last week has been a windy one, making irrigation difficult.

It's also the time of year that when we have a nice, cool morning we take an hour or two and cut some firewood or split some of the wood we already have on hand. We had a big pile of older wood out in the yard

that had to get moved, so we took the opportunity to get it cut down to size and split and stacked.

Ed the excavator came back on Monday to finish up the water line project. I had to order a special frost-proof hydrant for it that can handle larger volumes of water than a regular yard hydrant can. I also built a little manifold for it that has separate valves for the water in the packing shed, irrigation and the greenhouse. We got that all set and then I had him bury the old foundation and floor of yet another decrepit farm building. Gradually we are bidding adieu to the nostalgic remnants of a broken-down farmstead.

Coming next week: Arugula, cauliflower, broccoli, spinach, lettuce mix, peppers, onions, garlic, carrots and squash.

Basic Shell Beans

Slow, gentle cooking rather than boiling produces beans with a uniform texture and prevents skin breakage. Cooled in the cooking liquid, they remain moist and plump, with tight-fitting coats. If firmer beans with a dry texture and slightly more colorful skin are your preference (some like this way in salads), boil the beans in unsalted water until just tender. Add salt to taste, then drain. For pronounced flavor, cook beans in broth with aromatics.

3 cups fresh beans
1 to 2 tablespoons butter or olive oil
Savory or thyme sprigs and/or bay leaves
Salt

In heavy saucepan, combine beans, optional herbs, butter and cold water just to cover. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to very low. Cover and cook until beans are uniformly tender, monitoring heat to keep below a simmer to prevent breakage. Timing varies: between 15 and 30 minutes. Taste early, taste often.

When beans are tender, add salt and other seasonings, if desired. Uncover and allow to cool in liquid. Remove herb sprigs or bay leaves. Once they're nicely cooked and somewhat cooled we use them in a side-dish salad. Drain the beans, toss with olive oil, lemon juice, minced parsley and some sauteed onion or garlic.

Cooking squash

For the uninitiated the easiest way to cook squash is to carefully slice it in half lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and place cut side down on an oiled tray in a 350° oven. Bake until you can easily push a fork through the skin and flesh, 30-45 minutes. We also like it baked face-up with a heaping tablespoon of coconut oil in each half or quarter.