

Meet Your Farmers: Sinikwe (Nikki) Makarutsa

"New Entry, to me, means home," explains New Entry farmer Sinikiwe (Nikki) Makarutsa. Living in Lowell and homesick for her native Zimbabwe, Nikki used to buy African Maize (a starchy corn) and Rape (similar to collard greens) from a local farmer named Cornelius. These foods reminded her of the small farm she kept back home in Zimbabwe. Cornelius, another New Entry farmer, told Nikki about our Farm Business Planning Course and Incubator Farm Program, and Nikki saw an opportunity to re-connect with her agricultural roots and crops she missed so dearly.



Nikki completed our Farm Business Planning Course in 2004, and rented land on the New Entry Incubator Farm for two years. While she had originally started farming as a hobby, Nikki soon found that there was a lucrative market for traditional African crops, with customers offering to pick up directly at her farm just to get her maize and rape.

At that point she was ready to take on more land than the training sites could offer. With the help of New Entry's Land Matching Program, she found a 7 acre parcel owned by the Congregational Church of Littleton and set about creating Pamuzinda Farm. In her language, Pamuzinda means "home" and for Nikki, being able to connect with the land, grow familiar crops, and provide the local African immigrant community with traditional food has helped her establish a sense of place in her second home country. Pamuzinda has flourished since its establishment, allowing Nikki to expand production by purchasing a tractor and applying for a grant to build a hoop house. The hoop house helps Nikki extend her growing season into the fall, providing World PEAS with tomatoes well into September.

Though Nikki primarily sells her beautiful heirloom and slicing tomatoes to World PEAS, she grows a wide variety of crops including collard greens, summer squash, peppers, cabbage, eggplant, leeks, parsley and more. She uses this produce in her own CSA and at farmers' markets in Waltham (all of this is in addition to working as a nurse and independent medical provider- she truly is super human!). Nikki does have help from her husband, Max, who enjoys working with the tractor, and her three children- Glanda, Augustine, and Gisselah. In past years, Nikki has been able to hire workers to help with the farm as well.

Nikki would like to return to school to further her education, which would require her to cut back on her farming operations. When she discusses these plans with her customers, they plead with her to keep Pamuzinda operating at its current capacity, saying they wouldn't know what to do if they could not purchase her beautiful crops, particularly the African produce. She's debating the path forward, but agriculture will certainly continue to be a part of her life, forever connecting her to home.

Produce this week:

Long Bean • Bok Choy • Winter Squash • Carrots • Fingerling Potatoes • Garlic • Cherry Tomatoes • Apples

Also in Large Shares

Hakurei Turnips • Thyme

Crop Information:

Fingerling Potatoes



Fingerling potatoes are small, oblong heirloom potatoes, of which there are many cultivars. These potatoes should not be confused with new potatoes-fingerlings are bred to be small and long when full mature. Popular fingerling varieties include the yellow-skinned Russian Banana, the red/orange-skinned French fingerling, and the Purple Peruvian. Due to their size and heirloom status, these potatoes are more expensive than other potato varieties and are commonly either halved and roasted in a side dish or used for salads. Fingerling potatoes are known for their creamy texture and delicate flavor.

Handling: Wash potatoes. Peel if necessary; remove the "eyes" or green spots.

Storing: Potatoes should be stored at room temperature, away from light. Refrigerate baby new potatoes if not used within 2-3 days.

Risotto with Winter Squash & Leeks

Adapted from Bon Appetit Magazine

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
4 cups 1/2-inch cubes peeled butternut squash
3 cups 1/2-inch-wide slices leeks (white and pale green parts only)
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
2 cups arborio rice
4 14-ounce cans [or more] vegetable broth
1 cup chopped fresh basil
3/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
plus additional [for serving]

Preparation:

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat. Add squash and sauté until beginning to soften and brown around edges, about 5 minutes. Transfer squash to medium bowl. Reduce heat to medium; add remaining 1 tablespoon oil, leeks, and thyme to same pot and stir until tender but not brown, about 5 minutes. Add rice and stir 1 minute. Add 1 cup broth and simmer until absorbed, stirring frequently, 3 to 4 minutes. Add remaining broth by 1/2 cupfuls, allowing each addition to be absorbed before adding next, stirring often, about 15 minutes. Return squash to pot. Continue to cook until rice is just tender but still very creamy, stirring gently and often, about 10 minutes longer [about 25 minutes total cooking time]. Remove from heat. Stir in basil and 3/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer to large bowl and serve with additional Parmesan cheese.

Roasted Fingerling Potatoes

Adapted from chowhound.com

Ingredients:

1 1/4 to 1 1/2 pounds fingerling potatoes, washed and scrubbed
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary or thyme [optional]
3-4 garlic cloves, minced [optional]
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Preparation:

Heat oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit and arrange a rack in the middle. Place potatoes in a baking dish and toss with oil, salt, freshly ground black pepper and herbs or garlic [if using any]. Make sure the potatoes are well coated with oil and the baking dish is also well oiled. Add more as needed

Cover the baking dish with foil and place in the oven for 40 minutes. Check the potatoes. They should be tender all the way though when pierced with a knife, but still a little firm. If they are not, give them another 5-10 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool in the pan before serving.

Applesauce

Adapted from PBS Parents

Ingredients:

10 assorted apples
1/2 cup water
1/2 cup sugar
Juice of half a lemon
A generous sprinkle of cinnamon

Preparation:

Peel, core and chop the apples. In a large saucepan, add the apples, water and sugar. Bring the apple mixture to a boil and simmer. While the apples are cooking, add the cinnamon and lemon juice. Cook for 20 - 30 minutes with the lid ajar, stirring occasionally, until the apples are soft.

Remove from heat. With a wooden spoon, mash the soft apples into a sauce. Delicious served warm or cold.
Note: a food processor or immersion blender will help create a smoother texture.