

Meet Your Farmer, Phalla Nol

On any given Friday during market season, follow the crowd, and you'll be led directly to Phalla - a longtime vendor of the Lowell farmers' market. A sweet woman with a contagious laugh, Phalla is a New Entry farmer who comes to us from Battambang, a western province of Cambodia. While still very young, Phalla recalls accompanying her father - the mayor of their city at the time - to his potato farm.



She admits that her career in farming did not directly grow out of these early experiences, but what she knows about growing good food she learned from her father.

Phalla first got involved with New Entry about five years ago, because of her father. She says while she didn't feel farming was always in her blood, it was her father who inspired her to dig deeper. After he passed, Phalla honored his legacy by continuing to farm. Being a principled farmer is hard work, but Phalla says she's lucky to have the help of immediate and extended family. "My mother is my best helper!" she expresses with enthusiasm. Phalla is the grower and the saleswoman, while her mother is the organizational backbone of the whole operation.

Cultural food traditions are the heart of any community, and Phalla helps keep these alive by growing and selling popular Asian vegetables. Market goers are naturally drawn to her stand, for she is a farmer of uncommon delights: from bitter melon to pumpkin vines to amaranth leaves. If you're looking for something adventurous, try some luffa - also called Chinese okra but very different from the variety typical to the southern United States. This, she explains, take a long time to grow but is worth the wait. Whether sautéed, put in soup, or dipped in fish sauce, this is one of Phalla's favorites. This week, most of our garlic scapes come from Phalla!

While farming may slow down in the winter, Phalla doesn't indulge in an off season. As a side business, you can find her making custom Chinese playing cards. With such an entrepreneurial spirit, there is no doubt that Phalla will see great successes with all her future endeavors.

Produce this week:

Swiss Chard or Tokyo Bekana
Lettuce • Snow Peas • Cilantro
Hakurei Turnips • Garlic Scapes •
Green Onions • Strawberries

Also in Large Shares

Summer Squash

Crop Information:

Garlic Scapes



The garlic scape is the stem from which the seed head of the hardneck garlic bulb is formed. As the bulb begins to grow and mature, the garlic stalks lengthen and the scape begins to curve. The scape has a great deal of flavor, although the stalk never reaches the same level of intense garlic flavor as the bulb. Garlic scapes are very tender when young and should be harvested before they start to harden. Crushed garlic scapes can be used in place of garlic in most recipes, providing more of a fresh, green, taste with less bite than regular garlic cloves.

Handling: Chop the tender stalks and use like you would garlic on in any recipes. While you can eat the whole scape, some people remove the stalk tip and pod, because they are more fibrous than the stalk.

Storing: Scapes will last in refrigerator for about 3 weeks

Freezing: Store chopped garlic scapes (no need to blanch) in an airtight container in the freezer to enjoy this seasonal treat all year long.

Crop Information

Swiss Chard



Swiss chard is a very popular leafy green, popular in Mediterranean cuisine. It is thought to have originated in Sicily. Chard is actually an older, leafy variety of the beets- it just doesn't grow the big root tip, and instead, is cultivated for the tender greens. The leaves of Swiss chard are shiny, green, and ribbed. The stem color varies between white, yellow, and red, depending on the cultivar. When eaten raw, chard is bitter, but cooking removes this bitterness. They can be harvested when the leaves are young and tender or when they are mature and tougher. Swiss chard can be used instead of spinach or kale in most recipes. Like kale and spinach, chard is full of valuable nutrients, including vitamins A and C, as well as potassium or fiber.

Handling: Wash it well. If the stems are very thick, strip the leaves from them before proceeding so you can cook the stems a few minutes longer.

Storing: Chard is best when fresh, but will last 2-4 days in the fridge wrapped in damp towel or placed in plastic bag and in the hydrator drawer.

Freezing: Wash and remove any damaged pieces. Drop into boiling water for three minutes, cool the chard immediately in ice water, drain thoroughly and place in freezer bags. Remove air from the bag (to prevent freezer burn) and place in your freezer.

Swiss Chard Dip with Snap Peas

Adapted from Whole Living

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove, thinly sliced
3 cups thinly sliced swiss chard leaves (or Tokyo Bekana)
Coarse salt
1 cup low-fat cottage cheese
Pinch red-pepper flakes
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
2 cups snap peas, trimmed

Preparation:

Heat oil in a pan over medium heat. Add garlic and chard and season with salt. Cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Let cool. Transfer to a food processor. Add cottage cheese and puree until smooth. Season with pepper flakes and lemon juice. Bring a pot of well-salted water to a boil and cook peas until bright green and tender, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to an ice-water bath; drain. Serve with dip.

Roasted Hakurei Turnips and Green Onions

Adapted from farmerdaves.com

Ingredients:

As many hakurei turnips as you have, quartered
As many scallions (or onions or leeks) as you like, chopped into 1-inch pieces.
Sesame oil
Tamari or other soy sauce

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In baking pan large enough to fit all your vegetables, toss the vegetables with enough sesame oil and tamari to lightly coat everything. Spread out vegetables evenly on a baking pan. Roast for about 30 minutes, or until tender, stirring once or twice in between. Delicious!

Cilantro Walnut Pesto

Adapted from "The Healthy Kitchen," Weil and Daly, 2002

Ingredients:

1 cup walnut pieces
2 cups cilantro leaves, stems removed
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped
1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste
1 tablespoon cider vinegar or olive oil
1/4 cup water

Preparation:

Put the walnuts in a food processor and grind until fine. Add the cilantro, jalapeno pepper, salt, vinegar or oil, and 2-3 tablespoons of water and blend. Blend in a little more water if necessary to make a thick sauce. Taste and correct the seasoning. Keep any leftover pesto in the refrigerator in a tightly covered container and use as a dip or spread.