



The Pod

Community Supported Agriculture Newsletter

World PEAS is a program of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

Wednesday August 26, 2015

Meet Your Farmer: Bessie Tsimba

Before Bessie moved from Zimbabwe to Lowell some 20 years ago, she and her family, like 73% of rural Africans, grew most of the food that they ate, including maize, carrots, onions, cabbage, pumpkin. A few years ago, after moving from New Hampshire to Lowell, Bessie began to assist Sinikiwe Makarutsa [Niki], another New Entry farmer [also from Zimbabwe] with her farming. After helping Niki a number of times, Bessie decided she wanted to focus on farming in a more systematic way, and enrolled in the New Entry Farm Business Planning Course in 2009. After graduating from this course in 2010, Bessie also enrolled in our Incubator Farm Training Program.



For three growing seasons Bessie received one-on-one technical assistance from the New Entry staff while renting land at the Smith Farm in Dracut, MA—one of three New Entry training farm sites. In 2013, New Entry's Farmland Matching Service helped Bessie transition off the incubator site and onto a small farm in Harvard, MA. Bessie has now been renting and farming this land for three growing seasons. Some of your beautiful heirloom tomatoes may have come from Bessie's farm!

Bessie explains that her farming in Zimbabwe was more physical than it is in the States. Since they didn't have tractors or rototillers, everything had to be dug and cultivated by hand. In addition, without modern pumps and drip-irrigation, crop yields were entirely dependent on rain-fall. After Bessie left, there were years without sufficient rain-fall, during which her extended family in Zimbabwe were not able to grow enough food for their own consumption.

Bessie's capacity to simultaneously manage her job, professional development, family and farm business, is truly impressive. Bessie works for the State Mental Health Department, and is finishing a PhD in public health. She was one of the highest grossing New Entry farmers from sales of vegetables into the World PEAS CSA for 2010.

In addition to the CSA, Bessie has established her own markets in the congregations of Lowell and Worcester African churches. She connects with customers after church services, and sells her collard green, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, broccoli raab and maize. What Bessie enjoys best is the manual labor, and viewing the full growth cycle - from hoop house seedling to mature plant. Bessie says that it's easy to underestimate farm work. She feels that it can be overwhelming. At the same time, she says, farming can be addictive. No doubt, anyone who visits Bessie's fields would concur, addiction or no addiction, it takes an attentive person to create such a gorgeous palette of produce.

Produce this week:

Sweet Potato Greens or
Amaranth • Slicing Cucumber
Beets • Potatoes • Eggplant
Hot Peppers • Cherry
Tomatoes • Slicing Tomatoes •
Peaches

Also in Large Shares:

Arugula

Crop Information:

Sweet Potato Greens



Sweet potato greens are the robustly flavored leaves of the sweet potato plant. While sweet potatoes are usually grown for their edible tubers in the United States, the leaves of this crop are also often consumed in Southeast Asia and parts of Africa.

Cultivation of the sweet potato plant dates back to prehistoric times, likely originating in the tropical climates of Peru and Ecuador. The vines of the sweet potato have a delicate texture and can be used as one would spinach or kale greens. Sweet potato greens are slightly more bitter and tough than some, and are best prepared in a way that reduces this bitterness. The greens are edible raw, but are best when sautéed in the place of spinach, added to stir-fries, or chopped finely and added to salads.

Handling: Wash and chop sweet potato greens as you would other hearty greens.

Storing: Greens will keep for several days if wrapped in a damp towel or placed in plastic bag in crisper drawer.

Eggplant & Tofu Stir Fry with Hot Peppers

Adapted from "Real Simple"

Ingredients:

1 cup long-grain white rice
1/2 cup hoisin sauce
3 tablespoons rice vinegar
1 teaspoon cornstarch
4 tablespoons canola oil
1 pound firm tofu—drained, patted dry,
and cut into 1-inch cubes
1 small eggplant (about 1 3/4 pounds),
cut into 1/2-inch pieces
4 scallions, sliced, white and green parts separated
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 red serrano or jalapeño chili, sliced
kosher salt
1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, torn



Preparation:

Cook the rice according to the package directions. In a small bowl, whisk together the hoisin, vinegar, and cornstarch. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the tofu; cook, turning occasionally, until browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Add the remaining 3 tablespoons of oil to the skillet. Add the eggplant, scallion whites, garlic, chili, and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Cook, tossing frequently, until the eggplant is tender, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the hoisin mixture, tofu, and scallion greens and cook, tossing gently, until the sauce is thickened, 1 to 2 minutes. Serve with the rice and sprinkle with the basil.

Sweet Potato Greens Salad with Tomatoes

Adapted from the blog "Heart and Hearth"

Ingredients:

1 bunch sweet potato greens, washed, cut into bite sized pieces
2-3 large tomatoes, chopped
1 medium onion, chopped
1/3 cup rice vinegar
1 tablespoon sugar (or more if you prefer a bit sweeter taste)
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Blanch the leaves in boiling water. Drain. Immerse in cold water bath. Drain again. Mix the rice vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper together. Arrange the sweet potato leaves on a platter. Top with tomatoes and onions. Drizzle with the vinegar-sugar mixture.

Oven Roasted Potatoes and Cherry Tomatoes

Adapted from foodnetwork.com

Ingredients:

2 tbsp. olive oil
3 sprigs rosemary
3 mashed garlic cloves
1 pint cherry tomatoes
1 1/2 lbs potatoes, any type
Salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:

Put a baking sheet in the oven and preheat to 450 degrees F. If using small, fingerling potatoes, roast whole. For larger varieties, cut into eighths. Cut cherry tomatoes if half if desired. Toss potatoes with 2 tablespoons olive oil, 1 pint cherry tomatoes, 3 sprigs rosemary, 3 smashed garlic cloves, and salt and pepper. Put cut-side down on the hot baking sheet and roast 15 minutes. Flip the mixture and roast 10 more minutes.

