



The Pod

Community Supported Agriculture Newsletter

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

Wednesday September 30, 2015

Meet Your Farmer: JoAnn Robichaud

Like many others who attend our Explore Farming workshop, JoAnn Robichaud came to New Entry in 2010 as a gardener who wanted to farm. With many years of community gardening under her belt, JoAnn knew how to grow vegetables; but when she graduated from the Farm Business Planning Course in 2011 and began her first season on a quarter-acre plot at one of New Entry's incubator training farms in Dracut, Mass., JoAnn quickly discovered how different farming can be from gardening. Her plot was immaculate and her yields were good, but she was working very, very long hours to keep it that way.



That sounds like a description of the type of new farmer who might have easily burned out after year one. As you might've guessed, JoAnn didn't. Gaining new skills and figuring out labor efficiencies, and with the help of her partner Kamal Jain, JoAnn kept scaling up throughout her three years on New Entry's incubator farms and continued the trend as she moved Bobbin Farm to its current location, two acres leased from the Brooks School in North Andover. She might finally be ready to slow down – if you could call it that.

Working with Ashley Davies, New Entry's Farmland Matching Coordinator at the time, JoAnn worked out a lease agreement last year with the private school, which was a farm in the past. JoAnn pays for her land by devoting a percentage of what she grows to the school cafeteria.

JoAnn gushes about her arrangement with the Brooks School. After starting the year strong, JoAnn was hit hard when late blight wiped out all of her heirloom tomatoes, most of her cherry tomatoes, and close to half of her fingerling potatoes – some of the crops she grows best, and which she has often sold through New Entry's World PEAS CSA. But the school stood by JoAnn during her tough first season on the property.

The transition from New Entry's incubator training sites to this new land has presented plenty of challenges. JoAnn expected big things from the new site because of its favorable sandy loam soil type, but found the pH to be much lower than most vegetables would like. Mostly, though, JoAnn says she is learning just how much an independent farmer has to do to stay ahead throughout the whole growing season from start to finish.

Produce this week:

Mustard Greens • Winter Squash
Sweet Potatoes • Eggplant • Cider
Apples • Ground Cherries

Crop Information:

Sweet Potatoes



Sweet potatoes are in the morning glory family and native to North America. Sweet potatoes are grown in many parts and likely date back to prehistoric times, likely originating in Peru and Ecuador. In many parts of the world, sweet potatoes are grown for their edible leaves, as opposed to the sweet tubers with which we are more familiar in the U.S. Known as the “vegetable indispensable,” sweet potatoes were a main source of nutrition for early homesteaders and revolutionary soldiers. Sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) are often confused for yams (*Dioscorea batatas*) which are tubers of tropical vines more closely related to lilies and grasses than to sweet potatoes.

Handling: Handle sweet potatoes carefully to prevent bruising. Wash before using. Cut off any brown spots before using.

Storing: Storage in a dry, unrefrigerated bin kept at 55-60 degrees F. is best. Do not refrigerate, because temperatures below 55 degrees F will chill this tropical vegetable giving it a hard core and an undesirable taste when cooked.

Freezing: Cooked sweet potatoes store well in an airtight container in the freezer.

Sweet Potato Fritters

From Indonesian Regional Cooking, Sri Owen, 1995

Ingredients:

4 cups sweet potatoes, cubed

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup cane sugar (or brown sugar) or strong tasting cheese (such as Gorgonzola), crumbled

1 1/2 cups rice flour

1/2 cup cold water

1/2 teaspoon salt

peanut oil for frying

Preparation:

Boil the sweet potatoes in plenty of water with 1 teaspoon of salt. When cooked, mash them until smooth. Keep aside to cool them. Mix the rice flour with the water, 1/2 teaspoon of salt until you have a smooth batter.

When you are ready to fry the fritters, divide the mashed sweet potatoes into as many portions as you want. Take a portion and press it flat on a plate or on the palm of your hand. Put 1/2 teaspoonful of sugar or cheese on to the portion of sweet potato, close the potato round this filling, and form the fritter into a ball or the shape of a croquette [sugar is better for a breakfast fritter, while cheese makes it a more savory dish]. Repeat the process until all the ingredients are used up. Dip each fritter into the rice-flour batter before frying them in several batches until golden brown. Serve hot, warm, or cold.

Hot Cider Nog

Adapted from SouthernLiving.com

Ingredients:

2 cups half and half

1 cup milk

1 cup apple cider

2 large eggs

1/2 cup sugar

1/4 tsp ground cinnamon

1/8 tsp salt

1/8 tsp nutmeg

2 tablespoons chopped onion

Salt & pepper to taste

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

Preparation:

Whisk together 2 cups half-and-half, 1 cup each milk and apple cider, 2 large eggs, 1/2 cup sugar, 1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon, and 1/8 tsp. each salt and ground nutmeg in a heavy saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat, whisking constantly, 15 to 20 minutes or until mixture thickens and coats a spoon. Remove from heat; stir in 1/2 cup bourbon, if desired. Top each serving with sweetened whipped cream. Garnish with cinnamon sticks, ground cinnamon, and apple slices, if desired. Makes: 5 1/2 cups



Balsamic Glazed Chickpeas & Mustard Greens

Adapted from fatfreevegan.com

Ingredients:

10 ounces mustard greens

1/2 large red onion, thinly sliced

4-6 tablespoons vegetable broth, divided

4 cloves garlic, chopped

1 pinch red pepper flakes

1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

1/2 teaspoon soy sauce

1/4 teaspoon agave nectar or sugar

1 cup cooked chickpeas, rinsed and drained

Preparation:

Remove any large stems from the greens and discard. Tear the leaves into bite-sized pieces.

In a deep pot or wok, sauté the onion in a tablespoon or two of vegetable broth until mostly faded to pink, about 4 minutes. Add the chopped garlic and red pepper and another tablespoon of broth and cook, stirring, for another minute. Add the mustard greens, 2 tablespoons of broth, and cook, stirring, until greens are wilted but still bright green, about 3-5 minutes. Stir in the salt, if using. Remove greens and onions from pan with a slotted spoon and place in a serving dish, leaving any liquid in pan.

Add the balsamic vinegar, soy sauce, and agave or sugar to the liquid in the pan (if there is no liquid, add 2 tablespoons of broth). Add the chickpeas and cook, stirring, over medium heat until the liquid is reduced by about half. Spoon the chickpeas over the greens and drizzle the sauce over all.

Serve warm, with additional balsamic vinegar at the table.