

Week # 3 Timken Farm Community Supported Agriculture

Swallows, Owls and Ducks to the Rescue

I thought I might be going crazy. I had been fussing with my swallow boxes for weeks. Anxiously waiting, I would open the little doors and then close them. Make sure there were no cobwebs. Open the doors then close them. Scare the sparrows away from nesting in them. I actually went to Gig Harbor to speak to a man about swallow behavior. I stayed up late at night doing research on how to attract these tiny little birds on the internet. Finally one morning I went outside and the first thing I noticed was a swallow. I called to B and Heather to come look. They looked and left. I watched that swallow for a couple of hours unable to stay focused on my work. Then it left and there were no more swallows for weeks. I panicked and started opening and closing the box doors again. I was obsessed.

I am happy to report that the swallows are nesting at Timken Farm and I am not crazy. Why the fuss? Well, when you are an organic farmer and don't rely on chemicals to control pests and weeds you need nature to help you. Swallows consume a tremendous amount of flying insects each year and a nesting swallow with chicks to feed consumes a lot more. When you come to the farm next time take a moment to watch the swallows zing around over our fields. Most of our insect problems occur when a fly, like a rust fly, lays its eggs on the leaves of say a baby carrots. Once the maggots hatch they drop down and consume the carrot as food. It is our quest to break that cycle to provide you with a beautiful, nutritious carrot. We use floating row covers (the white sheets on the rows) and we rely on birds, like swallows, to help keep the fly population in check. We also use our Cayuga ducks as a part of our integrated pest management system (IPM). Each morning the ducks are let out into a run that surrounds a portion of the summer field. They eat an enormous amount of slugs as they move out and over their territory. When they have "worked" in the morning they are let out to roam and hit the pond for a dip and then again in the evening they "work" in the new orchard before going to bed. Our slug problems have been considerably less this year thanks to the ducks. Soon we will put up our new barn owl nesting box! I may never sleep again. A family of four barn owls can consume over 3000 rodents a year. We have had a similar box up for over a year and have yet to attract a nesting family. We are going to try a new spot and hope to have the boxes up before the farm tour on June 4th.

Mark

Heather's basic vinegar greens and slow beans-

Beans— these are great to make a big batch of and eat all week. I use dried black beans generally but black eyed peas are great or white beans would be fine. Soak beans in water overnight, rinse and cover with fresh water. Add whole garlic cloves, salt, pepper, cumin, paprika, grated clove, chili powder or cayenne. I put in a jar of last seasons

tomato sauce, a bit of oil and onions. Bring to a boil then reduce heat and cook until soft. The cooking process is long and slow. Stir here and there and taste and season as you go. Add water if necessary until they are good and done. Serve them with the greens for dinner, the next day throw extra beans in a tortilla with lettuce and cheese, warm through.

Also, you can puree the beans with oil and use as a dip with corn chips. At the end of the week you can cook them with whatever veggies including greens you might have left in a veggie broth and serve as soup with corn chips and sour cream garnish, grate some radish on top.

Greens-Sauté garlic and onion in butter and olive oil add salt and sugar let caramelize.. Tear up lots of your favorite greens and toss them in with a splash of water. When wilted add vinegar, I use apple cider or rice vinegar. Cook a moment more and serve with beans. I enjoy the beans and greens over brown rice in a bowl. And Grate radish on top, it's delicious.

Quick and easy: If you don't have the time to make the slow beans, serve the greens with brown rice and warmed flavored tofu, toss in tamari at the last moment while you sauté the greens to bring this easy dish together.

What's in your box:

Spinach— Olympia, Tye, Bloomsdale

Mustard greens— Osaka Purple, Mizuna

Herbs— Mint (for sun tea!)

Radishes— Cherry Belle

Salad Mix— 10 different varieties

Kale— Red & White Russian, Lacinato

Cayuga duck eggs— great scrambled, or in an omelet, and hard boiled

Food System Factoid: "Organic farming is a form of agriculture that relies on ecosystem management and attempts to reduce or eliminate external agricultural inputs, especially synthetic ones. It is a holistic production management system that promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity."

Wikipedia

"The birthright of all living things is health. This law is true for soil, plant, animal, and man: the health of these four is one connected chain."
- Sir Albert Howard