

The Gardens Are Still Producing

Written by Jeff Poppens
Tuesday, December 3, 2013

As it is mid-November, it's not surprising that people say to me, "I guess you are done with your gardening." My answer does surprise them. "No, the gardens are still producing like crazy and we'll be delivering vegetables for another six weeks."

In mid-August, after the spring and summer vegetables peter out, we sow all of our fields in fall crops. Buckwheat is used as a nurse crop for all kinds of brassicas, or cabbage family, plants. After a frost lays down the buckwheat, the gardens are full of food.

Arugula is a spicy green that reminds me of creasy salad. It is used like an herb, in small amounts. We try to send three bushels each week to our 180 member CSA.

The mustard patch looks great, with a bright green color and lots of frilly leaves. Mizuna is a lacey-leafed, mild mustard we grow too. 15 bushels go to town every week.

We send a few hundred turnips in each week, along with plenty of greens. Besides the common purple-top, we grow a white one called Haukeri, a red one called Scarlet Queen, and a yellow turnip, Gold Ball. Rutabega has leaves more like kale, but they are a lot like turnips, and our variety is All-American.

Daikon radishes come in several varieties, too. Besides the long white one, we have a red one, China Rose, and a green one that's red-fleshed called Watermelon radish. Daikons are a good mix for the cover crop because their roots go deep and help loosen heavy soils.

The flat-leafed Kale will go all winter. The other kales we have are Tuscany, Siberian and Red Russian. Georgia Collards are similar, with larger leaves.

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Bokchoys are fun to grow. Joi Choi gets huge, up to five pounds. Mei Qing is a more refrigerator friendly kind that gets to be about a pound. Tat Soi has deep green leaves, as does a variety called Vitamin Green. The Chinese Cabbage we grow are also called Napa, and we have two kinds, Minvet and Rubicon.

Lots of lettuces are still making heads, and mixed with Bloomsdale Spinach makes for an awesome salad. The lettuce won't last, but we should have spinach all winter and into spring.

The Swiss Chard and Parsley, planted in spring, have come back beautifully after a bit of summer dormancy. Our fall broccoli and kohlrabi did not make, I planted them too late.

Reemay, a floating row cover used for tobacco beds, gets stretched over the rows for 6' to 8' of frost protection. We try to hold it down with boards, and the wind tries to blow it off. What doesn't get covered suffers when the temperatures hit the teens.

The cellar still supplies red and white potatoes. A little garlic is still left, and enough onions for one more delivery. A few bushels of spaghetti squash and acorn squash are dwarfed by a ton or so of butternuts. These will keep all winter and help us do a winter CSA.

Best of all are the sweet potatoes. We eat them almost daily and never get tired of them. With a hundred bushels left, the CSA will have plenty.

For a special surprise, the old Arkansaw Black trees in my new front yard have yielded bushels of delicious apples. A persimmon tree on the ridge offers another even sweeter treat. Yes, it is no surprise that the gardens are still going great, and it looks like we'll have a lot to be thankful for this Thanksgiving.