

Johnson's Backyard Garden - April 5, 2008

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We'd like your input on the newsletter! Please send recipes, related news items, related book reviews and reading lists, etc to carolyn@johnsonsbackyardgarden.com

1) Farm News

A lot has been happening recently on the farm with the weather warming up! A quick run-down of new developments:

- Two weeks ago we welcomed a new full-time intern from North Carolina, Carolyn Fryberger (that's right we now have two Carolines – though one goes by Carrie – a Carolyn, and later this spring we will add a Carolina!).
- Our new 30x100 foot greenhouse arrived this week!
- Last week we received a big seed order which we've been busily tucking into the ground. Winter and summer squash, okra, cucumbers, beans, basil, watermelon, pumpkins, cantaloupe, sunflowers and zinnias....
- "All winter without 'em is a culinary bummer...What'd life be without homegrown tomatoes?" Well get excited because this week our tomato plants just started showing their very first, very tiny tomatoes! We also planted 8 more beds of tomato transplants as well as peppers, eggplants and tomatillos.



2) Upcoming Events

Annual CSA Potluck – Sunday May 4

Potluck Dinner from **5 – 7pm**, feel free to come early to see the farm, or stay late just to hang out! Held in the pecan grove at the farm, this is a great chance to meet the faces behind your CSA box as well as other CSA members. We'll have live music and activities for the kids. Please bring a dish to share, as well as place settings for you and yours.

RSVP through the Evite invitation (which you will receive shortly).

Outstanding in the Field Dinner – October 5, 3:00pm

This event – put on by Outstanding in the Field, a “restaurant without walls” – will feature a leisurely tour of our farm followed by a five course, farm-style dinner accompanied by a wine paired with each course. Featured chefs will be Jesse Griffiths and Tamara Mayfield of [Dai Due](#), in Austin. Tickets are \$180 and the event is almost sold-out! To make a reservation, or for more information, please visit:

http://www.outstandinginthefield.com/reservations_2008/1005Austin.html

Also checkout this explanatory video profiling Jim Denevan, sand artist and founder of Outstanding in the Field: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=9pVOUrJYt04>

(On a separate but related note, why did the scarecrow win the Nobel Prize?
Because he was out standing in his field!)

3) CSA Workshares Needed for April and May

Interested in work sharing in exchange for a veggie box? Our CSA is different from most in that weekly harvests are done largely by CSA members. In exchange for working from 8 – 12:30 on Saturday mornings you receive a CSA share of veggies. Most workshares come on Saturdays, but if your schedule allows we happily accept volunteers on weekdays too. Our CSA is growing rapidly and we always need plenty of friendly and energetic members to help with the harvest. Please E-mail us if you are interested in increasing your involvement with the farm in this way!



4) Kitchen Items Needed for Intern House

Thank you all for your generous furniture donations, my house is looking great and is very comfortable! The only thing lacking now are kitchen implements – silverware, a grater, dish-drying rack, cooking utensils, baking ware, pots and pans, etc....please let me know (carolyn@johnsonsbakyardgarden.com) if you have any extra kitchen items lying around, I'd put them to good use! Thank you!
~ Carolyn and all the future JBG interns

5) New Intern Perspective – Carolyn Fryberger

White Bread and American Cheese: How I Came to Intern at Johnson's Backyard Garden

Driving from my hometown of Asheville, North Carolina with my best friend Ginger, we had a running argument over whether or not there are diners in Texas. Ginger and I have taken many a road trip together, largely for the purpose of following our favorite musicians Gillian Welch and David Rawlings, and diners have always been a staple of these journeys. Places where macaroni and cheese is considered a vegetable, and waitresses aren't afraid to ignore you. We crave white bread and American cheese grilled to perfection, fries, never-ending coffee, vegetable plates with cornbread on the side. You can imagine our relief when in Onalaska Texas we spied the Yellow Rose of Texas diner (which we almost missed, who knew Texas state roads have a speed limit of 70, a rarity in North Carolina even for interstates).





It was about four in the afternoon and save for one delivery truck driver, we were the only customers. We slid into a booth, ordered our usual grilled cheese and fries, as well as a chocolate pie for me, and struck up conversation with our waitress. She wondered, as most people we met along the journey did, how in coming from North Carolina we had ended up way out on some country road and in her small town, were we lost? Taking the scenic route, we ventured. And why was I headed to Austin? To go to school? "No, to work on a farm."

At this her jaw dropped nearly to the floor, an expression she did not recover from for quite some time, "Why?!"

This is another question that I've had to answer a lot, and though my reasoning changes from day to day, there's nothing that I'm more sure of right now. Before coming to Johnson's, I've worked on smaller scale farms and gardens in the mountains of Western North Carolina. My background is Geography and Environmental Studies and in the long term I'd like to work in Nutrition and Food Policy. More simply, I just love food and I'm excited to try on farming as a lifestyle for a while, to work hard and get dirty. I told our waitress, a young made-up blonde woman from Houston, about Johnson's Backyard Garden, how it's different from the large conventional farms that surround Onalaska, and how the vegetables are sold directly to consumers through a CSA. I told her that I'm interested in studying nutrition policy (as I crunch down into good 'ol white bread and American cheese) and that to me understanding farm work is a crucial part of that education.

By the end of our conversation her smile had returned to her face. "That's really cool." she said.

She wished me luck, and Ginger and I headed out the door and back on the road. Before reaching the farm that night we were hoping to hit several roadside attractions, most important of which was a stop in College Station to search for the house that Lyle Lovett and Robert Earl Keen Jr lived in as students at

Texas A&M, the house with the porch that Lyle Lovett sings of in "This Old Porch." As we would discover from extensive on-the-ground research – interviews with passerbys on University Drive and the servers at Pita Pit, who were by far the most knowledgeable on the question – the house is probably gone. However, we did find a house with a great porch in approximately the right location, which in our minds was just as good.

After a final leg of driving in the dark, bleary-eyed and silly from being on the road we reached the farm late on the Saturday night before Easter. Easter morning we woke to happy shouts of small children as Brenton distracted the kids while Beth hid eggs for an Easter egg hunt. That afternoon, our roadtrip over, Ginger flew back to North Carolina (that's a friend for you), her plane passing over as down on the ground we burned large piles of pecan brush to make way for more vegetables. When I fell into bed exhausted after a day of hard work and lots of new information, it's you the CSA members I had to thank for having a bed at all. Thank you for the generous donations of house furnishings, hopefully soon I can express my gratitude in person. And so my year on the farm has begun – I'm looking forward to all there is to learn here and can't wait to meet all of you!

6) Garlicy Times – Grit Ramuschkat

Anything not benefiting from the addition of chocolate will probably benefit from the addition of garlic.
- culinary proverb



History of Garlic – Garlic or *Allium sativum* is a member of the onion family *Alliaceae*. Its close relatives are the onion itself, the shallot and the leek. Garlic originated in Central Asia. In Egypt, clay models of garlic bulbs were found that date back to 3000 B.C. and actual bulbs were found in the tomb of Tutankhamen dating back to 1500 B.C..

Growing Garlic – Each garlic bulb contains a number of garlic cloves, which are the individual sections we break of the bulb for cooking. Each individual clove forms into a whole new bulb within one growing season.

Here at the farm the garlic growing season was initiated with a "cracking-party," which involved a bunch of people gathered in the barn breaking the 100 pounds of organic garlic bulbs that Brent had purchased into individual cloves. In October, these individual cloves were planted into the ground - pointed end up, 4 inches apart and 2 inches deep. Growing garlic over the winter allows the garlic to use all its energy to develop a strong root system before growing its green tops. Also, spending all that time in the ground allows the individual clove to grow big, round and juicy.

As the day length changes in the spring, the garlic starts "heading up", meaning the original now chubby clove starts separating into individual cloves. On the farm, this is happening right around now. With the separation, the garlic reaches maturity and takes on its unique pungent smell and flavor. The garlic is fully matured and ready to be harvested when about 3/4 of the top leaves are brown and dry.

Spring Garlic and Mature Garlic – The garlic that has made its way into your veggie box recently is 'spring garlic.' Spring garlic is similar to spring onions in that it is the young plant that we are eating. Spring garlic and onions are milder than the mature plants. Use the white part as well as the lower part of the green stem in cooking where ever you'd use mature garlic.

Again, spring garlic is not a different plant, it stems from the same clove that makes mature garlic. We just harvest it earlier in the season (before it starts heading up) to allow for our costumers to have and eat fresh garlic for an extended period of time. Observe the garlic in your boxes closely from now on and you'll be able to witness its separation into grown-ups!

Recipe: Roasted Mature Garlic

4 large bulbs of garlic, left whole

1/4 C olive oil

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Cut the top 1/3 off each bulb to expose the cloves. Place the garlic bulbs on a piece of aluminum foil, drizzle with olive oil, and tightly wrap the foil around the bulbs. Roast until the cloves are soft and creamy - around 45 minutes to 1 hour depending on size.

Spread the cloves over warm bread, mix them into mashed potatoes, add them to pasta sauce or mash them into soups or mayonnaise. Roasted garlic keeps well in the fridge for several days.

7) Vegetable Storage Tips

We aim to grow and package our vegetables to maintain the highest taste and nutritional quality possible. However, once they've left the farm it's up to you to keep them fresh and nutritious. There's no refrigeration at the CSA drop points so it's good to pick up your box as early as possible, especially as the weather heats up. Here are some additional tips for storing this week's share:

- **Asparagus** is delicate and should be used within 2-3 days, wrap in a damp towel and store in plastic bags or bins.
- **Berries** are best covered in the fridge. Don't wash until you use them - too much moisture in the package speeds spoilage.
- **Spinach, Kale, Chard, Lettuce, and Cooking Greens** have the same crisper life and should be kept in plastic bags. Any bunch greens can be freshened by cutting an inch of the bottom stalks and soaking the entire bunch in cold water for 10 minutes. Place in a plastic bag in the fridge for a few hours to revive.
- **Salad Greens** should be washed immediately then spin dried. Rebag them and place in the

refrigerator.

Checkout our [storage tips](#) on our website for a more complete guide, and of course feel free to contact us with any questions.

8) Recipes

**We would love to share your recipes too! Please email your favorites to:

carolyn@johnsonsbackyardgarden.com

We've had several weeks of asparagus (don't you love spring?), so here's something new to try with it. This recipe is taken from Alice Waters' *The Art of Simple Food*, a great CSA cookbook as recipes are organized by vegetable.

Asparagus and Lemon Risotto

1 pound asparagus

1 lemon

2 T butter

1 onion

1 ½ cups risotto

5 cups chicken broth

½ cup dry white wine

1/3 cup fresh grated parmesan

Snap the ends off the asparagus and cut into ¼ inch pieces. Zest and juice the lemon.

In a heavy-bottomed 2 ½ - 3 quart saucepan, sautee the onion in butter over medium heat. Cook until soft and translucent, about 10 minutes. Add the risotto, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 4 minutes. Do not let it brown.

Meanwhile, bring to the chicken broth to a boil and then remove from heat.

Stir the lemon zest into the sautéed rice, then add the white wine. Cook, stirring fairly often, until all the wine is absorbed. Add 1 cup of warm chicken broth and cook at a vigorous simmer, stirring occasionally. When the rice starts to thicken, pour in another ½ cup of broth and add some salt (to taste). Keep adding rice ½ cup at a time every time the rice thickens. Do not let the rice dry out. After 12 minutes stir in the asparagus. Cook until the rice is tender but still has a firm core, 20 to 30 minutes in all. When rice is just about done, stir in half the lemon juice, 1 T butter and the parmesan. Stir vigorously to develop the creamy starch. Taste for salt and lemon juice, adding more as needed. Add more broth if the rice becomes too thick. Let sit uncovered for 2 minutes, then serve.

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We've also seen a lot of chard lately – I don't know about you, but until recently I haven't known what to do with chard aside from sautee it. Here's a recipe that expands chard horizons. We've actually included it in our newsletter before, but we liked it so much! This version is also from the *Art of Simple*

*Food.*

## **Chard Gratin**

1 ½ bunches chard (and/or spinach)  
1 cup breadcrumbs  
2 ½ T butter  
1 onion, diced  
salt, to taste  
2 t flour  
½ cup milk  
freshly grated nutmeg

Wash and stem the chard, saving half the stems and slicing them thin. Bring 2 quarts salted water to a boil, add the sliced stems and cook 2 minutes. Add chard leaves, cook until tender, about 3 minutes. Drain and cool. Gently squeeze out extra liquid and chop coarsely.

Toss the breadcrumbs with 2 t melted butter. Toast on a baking sheet at 350 F, stirring now and then, until lightly brown, about 10 minutes.

Sautee the onions in 1 ½ T butter, cook over medium heat for 5 minutes. Stir in chard and salt. Cook for 3 minutes, then sprinkle with the 2 t flour. Stir well, then add the milk and nutmeg. Cook for 5 minutes more, stirring occasionally. Add more milk if the mixture gets too thick. The chard should be moist but not floating.

Butter a small baking dish. Spread the chard mixture in evenly and dot with 2 t butter. Sprinkle breadcrumbs over the top. Bake at 350 F until golden and bubbling, 20 to 30 minutes. Serve alone or as a dip with chips or pita bread.

\*\*For a similar flavor with less prep time, parboil (as described above) the chard 4 minutes, then chop and sautee in butter (3 T per bunch of chard) adding salt to taste. Then stir in freshly grated parmesan cheese, a generous handful for each bunch of chard.

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Finally for all those lovely salad greens (how about that baby arugula!) here's an assortment of dressings, extracted from Mollie Katzen's classic *Moosewood Cookbook*.

Ranch Dressing

1 cup buttermilk
optional: 2 – 3 T sour cream or mayo OR ¼ cup cottage cheese
2 – 3 T dried onion flakes
¼ - ½ t salt (to taste)
1 t lemon juice
lots of black pepper

Variations: add ½ cup crumbled Roquefort and/or 1 – 2 cloves crushed garlic

Whisk everything together and store tightly covered in the fridge.

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### **Basic Vinaigrette**

This dressing keeps for weeks and only gets better with age.

- 1 cup olive oil
- 4 – 5 T red wine vinegar
- ½ - 1 t salt
- 1 – 2 cloves garlic, minced

Variations:

- substitute different flavors of vinegar (fruit infused, balsamic, etc)
- substitute some of the olive oil with a nut oil
- add 1 - 2 T Dijon mustard
- for a creamy vinaigrette add 2 – 3 T mayo, sour cream or yogurt
- add herbs, finely minced parsley, dill, basil, marjoram, chives, thyme or tarragon
- add 3 – 4 T apple or orange juice, or 2 T lemon juice

Carolyn's favorite version is to use balsamic vinegar and add Dijon mustard, tarragon, honey, black pepper and lemon juice. Caroline (that's right there's a Carolyn and a Caroline, it's confusing) leaves out the vinegar, uses lots of lemon juice and mustard and adds fresh onions and any other fresh spices on hand. We eat a lot of salad around here!

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Gazpacho Dressing

- 1 cup tomato juice
- 1 cup diced cucumber (peeled and seeded)
- 1 minced scallion
- 1 clove garlic
- a few leaves fresh basil, or ½ tsp dried (our basil seeds arrived just this week!)
- 1 – 2 T fresh dill, or 1 – 2 t dried
- small handful fresh parsley
- 1 – 2 t lemon or lime juice
- salt and pepper to taste

Puree everything together in a blender or food processor. Cover tightly and chill.

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