

Johnson's Backyard Garden, June 3rd



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We'd like your input for the newsletter! Please send related news articles, book reviews, recipes, etc to carolyn@johnsonsbackyardgarden.com

We're on MySpace, [be our friend!](#)

1) In Your Box this Week

Beefsteak Slicer Tomatoes
Sun Gold Cherry Tomatoes
Zucchini
Patty Pan Squash
Zephyr Squash
Yellow Straight Neck Squash
Cucumbers
Sweet Peppers
Ichiban Eggplant
Basil
Leeks
Butternut Squash
Red Lasoda Potatoes
Grapefruit (1)
Cabbage (Wed only)
Zinnia bouquets – look for these in a bucket at your pickup site.

Coming Soon: Okra, Ten Varieties of Winter Squash, Tomatillos, Mini Baking Pumpkins, Watermelons, Cantaloupe, Honeydew Melons, San Marzano Sauce Tomatoes, and Twenty Heirloom Tomato Varieties.

As the unexpected never fails to happen, keep in mind that this list is subject to change depending on availability and quality of crops on harvest day. You'll find the most accurate packing list on the homepage of our [website](#). The website list also features links to online recipes, pictures (for the more unusual veggies) and other interesting tidbits.

2) Farm News

- This week we are welcoming **three new interns** – Natalie, Jeff and Sarah! We are so excited they are here, the farm is now a veritable hive of activity.
- The only people who get as excited about bulldozers as Brent does are generally under the age of 5. Last week a childish grin appeared on Brent's face as a monstrous yellow machine finally finished clearing the pecan trees from the back field. The land this made available for production doubles our field space, bringing it to a total of 16 acres!



- Two **new coolers** arrived this week, and the timing couldn't be better with potatoes, winter squash, tomatoes and summer squash all at full production. Tomatoes and summer squash in particular have to be harvested nearly every day so the additional storage space will quickly be filled.
- We need more **work-share volunteers!** With summer vegetables producing like crazy and new land to prepare there's a lot of work to be done around here. Most work-shares come on Wednesday or Saturday morning, 8am to 12:30, but we can use the help on any day that works for you. You'll help with harvesting as well as whatever projects we have going on that day, in exchange you get to take home a box of veggies! Email us if you're interested.
- Farm office hours - you can expect someone to be in the office to answer the phone or return an email **Monday through Friday 8am to 12pm.** Our Farmstand hours will be Saturdays 9am to 1pm, with on farm Saturday CSA box pickup in the afternoon, 2pm to 7pm. Generally there is no one in the office on Wednesday or Saturday afternoons during box pickup, so if you have an issue just leave us a detailed message and we will get back to you first thing when we get back in the office. If you're calling because your name is not on the pickup list, please do not take a box; we'll get one to you if need be then next time we're in the office. Thanks!
- We're still looking for design submissions for a Johnson's Backyard Garden **logo** and/or **t-shirt design.** Winner will receive a 4-week CSA membership! Submit your design by email (carolyn@johnsonsbaycardgarden.com), snail mail or in person. Deadline June 15th.

3) Farmstand Opens June 7th

Our farmstand is set to open **Saturday June 7th, 9am to 1pm.**

**For those who pickup CSA boxes at the farm, the boxes will be located in the farmstand area but will be

available for pickup during the usual time, 2pm – 7pm.**

Nothing fancy to begin with, the farmstand will be a small tent setup in the pecan orchard. Enjoy the excitement of a Saturday morning harvest on the farm; bring the kids, have a picnic in the orchard and pickup some veggies!

This Saturday the farmstand will probably have:

Summer Squash – Zucchini, Zephyr, Patty Pan, and Yellow Straight Neck

Tomatoes – Slicers and Sun Gold Cherries

Mini Baking Pumpkins

Winter Squash – Butternut and Acorn

Okra – Green and Burgundy

Pecans

Garlic

Onions

Basil

Red and White Potatoes

Zinnias

Eggs from Ringer Family Farm

We are located at 9515 Hergotz Lane, 5 miles from the airport in East Austin. When you arrive, use the farm entrance at the very end of Hergotz Lane, drive in past the second fence and park on the right-hand side of the road in the pecan orchard. Then look for the white tent in the rear of the orchard.

4) Beef Shares: Four Shares Still Available, Butchering Scheduled for June 10th

We currently have three nice and healthy Black Angus steers that we will be taking to the butcher in Giddings on June 10th. The cattle are grass-fed, raised naturally and are antibiotic and hormone free. Our farm was their home last year, but as our farm expanded they moved back to their original home at our neighbor Sam's Y&B Ranch.



Each beef share will be a quarter of beef consisting of a mixture of various cuts such as T bones, rib eyes, chuck roast, brisket, round steak, hamburger and soup bones, totaling an estimated 75 pounds. You will need

approximately 2-3 cubic feet of freezer space for proper storage. The meat will be processed at Doyle's Processing Plant in Giddings Texas, about an hour outside of Austin, and will be packed and labeled in butcher paper.

Pricing: The price will be based on \$4.00 per pound of dressed weight and calculated at the time of processing. To reserve your beef share, we are taking deposits of \$250 on a first come first serve basis. This deposit will be deducted from the final cost of the beef, calculated at the time of processing. There are only four shares left!

5) Site-Work by Johnson's Backyard Garden
by intern Carolyn Fryberger

When the road of excess has reached the palace of wisdom, it is a healed wound, a long scar.
- Wendell Berry

Driving out to our farm is not your typical Sunday drive in the country. You do pass a few cows, but most of the landscape feels like a strange industrial wasteland – large piles of mulch, dirt, bricks, concrete and gravel, matched by corresponding pits where some of these materials have been extracted. This extractive, industrial land use – operated by Marcello's Sand and Loam, Austin Reclaimed Materials, Austin Aggregates and Capitol Aggregates – dominates the 2,400 acres in our bend of the river.

I hadn't fully realized the extent of these gravel pit mines until last week when Brenton and I went to visit our cows with our neighbor Sam (check out the [satellite imagery](#) to get an idea for yourself). Sam has managed cattle in the Hergotz area for 30 years, starting when he was just fifteen.



He drove us up and down over this landscape which he has watched turn from pasture to pit mine. We went down into gravel pit mines which dwarf the big Mac trucks constantly hauling materials in and out. We looked over the edges of lakes, up to 60-acres in size, that were once pit mines, and before that prime farmland. We passed through areas of land that have been "reclaimed," pits which have been filled in with dirt and other materials from building sites in downtown Austin making the land level again (though not completely stable).



Essentially the cycle is this: a piece of land starts as a farm or ranch, well no, let's go back further – a piece of land starts as a forested tract, and it is then cleared to become a farm or a ranch. This area was once a major spinach producer, and after that was largely cattle ranches.

Then the land is leased to an aggregate mining company which takes out the topsoil and sandy loam first (ever wonder where 'fill dirt' comes from?), followed by sand and gravel. These materials are used to make concrete, suburban lawns, and etc. This process can take anywhere from one year to 15 years depending on the demand for the materials.

Once these materials have been extracted, the resulting pit is "reclaimed," i.e. filled in with whatever materials are available – dirt, old bricks, old sidewalks, etc. "Site-work by Jimmy Evans" say the signs at new construction sites around town – meaning that when a new building is built with a four-story underground parking garage, all of the dirt that must be removed will likely end up in these pits. These pits are thus a necessary part of Austin, providing and accepting the raw materials required for development. For every building rising up, there is an equivalent depression in the ground, somewhere on the outskirts of town.



After the pit mine has been “reclaimed” (here the signs cheerily proclaim “Another Site Improvement by Austin Aggregates”), the cattle are returned to the land thus securing agricultural tax status until the land is ready for resale. It may be up to 20 years before that can happen however, as the materials must settle and stabilize before anything can be built. The land will then become home to warehouses and other industrial uses, as much of this area is not suitable for residential development.

Coming back to our farm after a two-hour tour of this surrounding landscape I was hit by a mix of very strong emotions. On the one hand, it’s depressing to see how small our farm is, just 20-acres of green next to thousands of acres of grey and brown. It’s depressing to watch prime farmland be carted away by the truckload and then replaced with construction waste. All so that someone can grow grass. And to realize that because of these pits, our pastures will not be as green – having exposed land on two sides of our farm affects our ability to extract and retain water on site. It makes the work that we do every day feel so futile in a way, why am I working so hard?, I wonder. Why not just go get a real job, make enough money that I can have a nice house and all those things that everyone else seems to want, all those things that these gravel pits make possible? Certainly our little farm is not going to affect any of the activity around us, so why are we waste our energy, why not just sell to the aggregate mining companies who are already eyeing this property?

Yet at the same time these thoughts are bouncing around my head (and yes, spilling out of my eyes) I look at all the work that needs to be done on our farm and I get excited. I see the faces of the wonderful people I live and work with here, the happy healthy Johnson kids. I think of the look on friends’ faces when they eat one of our tomatoes, and the joy that our workshares so obviously get from a day spent in the fields, away from the city. And Brent, well he would just go crazy if he wasn’t always overwhelmed with work. There is meaning and community in doing this work, even though it doesn’t pay off in the traditional way.

My task for the rest of the day is to plant hundreds of trays of seeds – eggplants, tomatoes, peppers, tomatillos – and as I do so, I imagine carpeting the neighboring pits with these seedlings. Wendell Berry writes of scars on the

landscape as being markers of limits, part of our collected cultural knowledge. Perhaps these pit mines are the scars, the cultural maps that will help us learn to build better cities, cities that can produce food.

“An art that heals and protects is a geography of scars” Berry writes. Agriculture is our art. “Site-work by Johnson’s Backyard Garden.” The dirt extracted from the city would stay in the city, where it would be used to produce transplants for the gravel pits. We would cart away the city’s organic matter to enrich the soils, covering these open scars with green. What we would bring back to the city would be truckloads of fresh vegetables. We’ll show you site improvement.

6) 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. Here are some additional tips on how to store this week’s share:

Fridge

- **Cabbage** will last up to two weeks in the fridge.
- **Leeks** wrap in plastic and use within a week.
- **Peppers** and **Cucumbers** should be stored in the crisper, and washed in cold water before use.
- **Zucchini** and other **Summer Squash** will last 4-7 days in plastic bags in the crisper.

Counter

- **Basil** can be stored upright in a jar of water at room temperature, or in an open bag on the counter.
- **Grapefruit** is best kept at room temperature of 60-70 degrees and used within two weeks. Do not store in plastic bags.
- **Eggplant, Potatoes** and **Winter Squash** are best kept moderately cool, no lower than 50 degrees. A cool, dry dark place is best- on the counter, in a cupboard or basket. Eggplant are delicate and do not store well, so try to use them within a few days.
- **Tomatoes** should be kept at room temperature, but can be refrigerated if very ripe. Leaving them in the paper bag will help them ripen quickly.
- **Zinnias** should be put in a clean vase of warm water. Cut the stems first under running water. Change the water daily and store in the refrigerator at night to extend freshness even longer.

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

7) Recipes – Gad-ZUKES!

Zucchini seems to be the ‘greens’ of summer, already I have talked to CSA members who have zucchinis taking over their fridge. Happily, zucchini, and other summer squash, are very versatile and can be used in a wide range of dishes. Here’s a list of some of the things we’ve done with zucchini and summer squash on the farm lately:

- Baked goods – zucchini bread, cookies (see below) and brownies

- Pizza – as a topping or as a ‘crust’ (see below)
- Pasta – cooked down as a sauce (see below)
- Stir-fry
- Gratin – thinly sliced, layered in with potatoes
- Pancakes – grated yellow squash is especially good in this form
- Fritters
- With eggs – omelet, frittata, scrambled
- Crock Pot – with chicken, rice and tomatoes and seasonings
- Vegetable kabobs – marinated and grilled over an open fire

Some general notes on summer squash preparation:

- Rinse it but don’t peel it.
- Raw you can add it to salads, just grate it or cut it into matchstick-like slices.
- Microwaving is a quick way to prepare a couple servings of squash: cut it into slices and microwave on high for 2 minutes, turning and stirring after one minute.
- You can also pickle it (my Grandpa Fryberger makes *amazing* pickled zucchini which I unfortunately don’t have the recipe for offhand...look for that in an upcoming newsletter), put it in soups, roast it in the oven, grill it, stuff it, make relish, put it in tacos, steam it...

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## Zucchini Chocolate Chip Cookies

One of the grandest culinary deceptions, this recipe is from Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*

Combine in large bowl:

- 1 egg, beaten
- ½ cup butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract

Combine in a separate, small bowl

- 1 cup white flour
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp nutmeg

Mix the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients.

- 1 cup finely shredded zucchini
- 12 oz chocolate chips

Stir these into other ingredients, mix well. Drop by spoonful onto greased baking sheet, and flatten with the back of a spoon. Bake at 350°, 10 to 15 minutes.

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Zucchini Pizza

Crust -
3 1/2 c. grated zucchini
3 eggs, beaten
1/3 c. flour
1/2 c. grated Mozzarella
1/2 c. grated Parmesan
1/2 tsp. basil, minced
Salt and pepper

Topping -
Tomato sauce
Cheese
Veggies
Etc

Salt zucchini lightly and let sit 15 minutes. Squeeze out all excess moisture. Combine crust ingredients and spread onto an oiled 9x13 inch baking pan. Bake 20-25 minutes at 350 degrees until surface is dry and firm. Brush top with oil and broil it under moderate heat for 5 minutes.

Pile all of your favorite pizza toppings on and heat in a 350 degree oven for about 25 minutes. Serve hot.

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**Zucchini Sauce**

An Italian friend of mine recently cooked this for me and it totally changed my perspective on pasta sauce – did you know nearly any vegetable can be cooked down into a sauce like tomatoes can? Amazing!

4 – 6 T olive oil  
1 Onion (red is best)  
3 Zucchini  
Wine, white or red  
Salt and Pepper to taste  
Several leaves of fresh mint, chopped

Sautee onions in oil with salt and pepper until the onions are clear. Add thinly sliced zucchini and cover the pan. Keep covered, stirring occasionally, and let the zucchini cook down, really, really down. Pour yourself a glass of wine, adding a splash of it to the zucchini. Now go relax with your glass of wine – the most important thing is to let this whole mixture cook down for a while, just like with a tomato sauce. When the zucchini and onions are really soft and browned it is getting close to being done. Just before you take it off the stove, add the fresh mint. Then stir it into your pasta and top with fresh grated parmesan. Pour yourself another glass of wine and enjoy!

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The following two recipes were passed along from CSA member Melani Novinger, and originated with her Grandma, Arlene Hess. Melani also recommended the cookbook *Simply in Season* by Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert, available at Ten Thousand Villages on South Congress. We just recently got a copy of this for the farm and I would whole heartedly agree with Melani that it is an excellent resource for creative seasonal cooking.

Chilled Zucchini Soup

4 med zucchini, quartered and sliced
1 t pepper
4 c chicken broth
2 (8-oz) pkgs cream cheese
1 bunch green onions, chopped
1 T fresh dill, chopped
1 t salt
1 (8 oz) container sour cream

Combine first five ingredients (through pepper) in saucepan. Cook, stirring occasionally 20 minutes. Add cream cheese and dill.

Process in batches in blender until smooth. Cover and chill 5 hours. Stir in sour cream.

Mock Crab Cakes

2 c. grated **zucchini**
1 c Italian bread crumbs
1 egg beaten
1 t chopped parsley
1 T. mayo
1 Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp. (Ye) Old Bay Seasoning

Mix all ingredients together. Form into cakes and fry in hot oil until brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels.

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Ok, surely there's something in all those recipes that will help you whittle down your zucchini share a bit! If you find some creative ways to use zucchini (or any other vegetable), let me know...

~Carolyn

[carolyn@johnsonsbakyardgarden.com](mailto:carolyn@johnsonsbakyardgarden.com)

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## 8) Upcoming Events

### [June Fruit and Veggie Fest](#)

The Sustainable Food Center is hosting special events every Saturday of June, 9am – 1pm, at the Austin Farmer's Market (Republic Square Park, 4<sup>th</sup> and Guadeloupe):

June 7 – Picnic & Customer Appreciation Day  
June 14 – Fruit & Veggie Fest Taste of Summer Day  
June 21 – Tomato Me Crazy Day  
June 28 – Watermelon Festival

[The Omnivore's Delight](#) – June 22, 2 - 4 pm Monthly Markey Day at our friend's Home Sweet Farm in Brenham, TX

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#### 9) Subscribe/Unsubscribe To Newsletter

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#### 10) Johnson's Backyard Garden Contact Information

Johnson's Backyard Garden

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Office phone: (512) 386-5273

Office Hours : M-F, 8am – 12pm

Farmstand Hours: Saturdays, 9am – 1pm

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