



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

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Hope in the Wild Seeds, by Laura

Kummerer

As I enter into the third year of restoring the damaged grassland on High Ground Organics' Conservation Easement, I am surrounded by seed. Bags upon bags of native grass and wildflower seed are crowding every empty corner of my living space. Fifty gallon drums of seed stalks are stashed in to any dry, rodent free niche I can find on the farm. I feel like an acorn woodpecker carefully stowing away my precious harvest in a granary tree for lean times. Every time I walk by one of my "granaries", I am filled with hope in the transformative power of these bags bulging with the promise of new life.

These seeds are a culmination of two years of work. Small quantities of them were harvested at the beginning of this project from the few remnant native bunch grass and wildflower stands left around the Watsonville Slough system. They were then grown up to seedlings in the greenhouse and planted and tended in farm beds on the edge of the farm. We have harvested from them for the last two years and have turned the handful of seeds we started with into bushels of them. You may wonder why we went to all of this trouble for our seed when native grass seed can be easily purchased in a seed catalogue. Well, just as the CSA provides local produce that is grown in balance with the cycles, nutrients and soils of a local ecosystem, these locally collected native grass seeds have the genetic coding that evolved with the unique ecological processes of the Watsonville Slough system. We want to preserve the seeds of this region since they are uniquely adapted to the cycles of this area rather than buy seed that evolved to live with the cycles of the Central Valley or elsewhere

I wonder if the acorn woodpecker enjoys harvesting and admiring the beauty of seeds as much as I do. The sensual process of gathering seed by hand is one of the most calming and meditative activities I know. When you collect seed time slows down and you get to know the plant you are collecting from in an intimate way. You get to really see the soft grey fuzz on the underside of the Blue Wild Rye leaves. You get to run your fingers up the tall, towering stalk of this bunch grass and feel the seeds release themselves into your collection basket. Each seed looks, feels and ripens differently. When you harvest you get to recognize these differences in your gut.

The Meadow Barley seed for example doesn't ripen all at once. It ripens from the top down. So when you harvest you

End of Year Announcements

As our season draws to a close (last deliveries Nov. 19th, 20th, 21st), many of you have been asking about signing up for our 2009 CSA season. We are not yet accepting subscriptions for next year but will be including an announcement in the newsletter soon with details about signing up.

And, if you still have **balances due** on your account, please send us your payment immediately. If you're not sure if you have a balance due, look on the sign in sheets next to your name. Make checks payable to Two Small Farms and mail to P.O. Box 2065, Watsonville, CA 95077.

must make many passes. Sometimes it takes a month or more for every seed on the plant to be ready to be pinched off and put in your collection basket. The beautiful Purple Needle grass is the opposite. It can go from immature to fully ripe and falling off its stem within three days if there is a heat spell. Although the timing of harvest is tricky, the seed you do catch is quite beautiful. It is covered with the softest coat of velvety hairs which help to keep it from desiccating in the hot, California sun. If I was a microscopic insect I would pick the plush Purple Needle Grass seed to bed down on over any other. The California Oat Grass seed has another strategy for sending its smooth and delicate seed into the world. It folds its most viable seed between its stem and its leaf blade. In early summer the stems fall off the plant, but the seed

is not released until the winter rains. You harvest the seed from this mounding bunch grass by raking up the dried stems that have fallen.

As I write this article the first rains of the season are falling outside. The rains are the call that the land is ripe to receive the beautiful array of seed that I have stashed away in my "granaries". In a few days this seed will be thrown back out into the wild, where hundreds of years ago it thrived. Although I make it sound haphazard, we are not quite just throwing the seed to the winds. These seeds will be sown into the land that we have been clearing of weeds and thatch over the past two years with our rotational grazing and hand weeding program. The weeds that inevitably will come as the winter rains continue will be mowed and kept short for the next two years to give the slower growing native grass seedlings the time to take up their space once again.

This Week

Cilantro ^{HG}

Tomatoes ^{MF}

Sweet Peppers ^{MF}

Red Leaf or Little Gem Lettuce ^{HG}

Chioggia or Red Ace Beets ^{HG}

Leeks OR Delicata Squash ^{HG}

Cabbage OR Romanesco ^{HG}

Yellow Carrots ^{MF}

Rosemary ^{MF}

Flowers: Mixed Bouquet ^{HG,*}

This winter I hope these wild seeds will find fertile soil and flourish in their new/old home. Along with sowing seeds, we will be planting 7,000 sedges, grasses, rushes and wildflowers that were grown from tiny seeds in our greenhouse. It will take a multitude of hands to bring this planting to life during the nourishing rains of winter. (See box for community volunteer days.)

Notes and Recipes

Storage notes: Leave the tomatoes & delicata squash out on your kitchen counter. Store the rest of your veggies in your refrigerator. Remove the greens from the beets and carrots before storing (they store better and keep more nutrients without the greens) and use the beet leaves as a cooking green within the first day or two.

Carrot and Beet Salad with Ginger Vinaigrette, from *Gourmet*, April 1994

¼ cup minced shallot	1 clove garlic, minced
2 TBS minced peeled fresh ginger	¼ cup rice vinegar
1 TBS soy sauce	½ cup finely shredded carrots
½ tsp. Asian (toasted) sesame oil	4 cups finely shredded peeled raw beets (about ¾ pound)
olive oil	Tabasco to taste
4 cups spinach, washed thoroughly, for garnish, opt.	

In a blender puree shallot, ginger, and garlic with rice vinegar, soy sauce, sesame oil, and Tabasco. With motor running add olive oil in a stream and blend until smooth.

In separate bowls toss carrots with half of the dressing and beets with remaining half. Divide carrot salad and beet salad among 6 plates and garnish with spinach leaves. Serves 6.

Sweet Pepper and Lentil Soup, inspired by a recipe in *Not Your Mother's Slow Cooker Cookbook* by Hensperger and Kaufmann

2 TBS olive oil	1 onion, or 2 leeks, chopped
3–5 cloves of garlic, chopped	1 tsp. freshly purchased paprika or smoked paprika
1–3 sweet peppers, seeded and finely chopped	1 cup dried brown or black lentils, picked over and rinsed
5 cups broth or water	S & P to taste (at least 1 tsp.)
1–2 TBS champagne or sherry or rice vinegar	

Cook the onion in 1 TBS oil over medium heat in a skillet until the onion/leeks begin to soften. Stir in paprika and allow it to cook for about a minute more. Add the chopped sweet pepper and cook for another 2–3 minutes, until everything begins to soften. Scrape all this into a slow cooker. Add the lentils and broth (or water) and stir to combine. Cover and cook on low until the lentils are completely soft, 7–9 hours.

Season the soup with S & P (more salt if you used water, less if you used purchased broth), and last TBS olive oil. Stir in 1 TBS of one of the vinegars, more if needed. Serve hot.

Everything in your box and the flowers are organically grown. From Mariquita Farm: tomatoes, sweet peppers, yellow carrots, rosemary. From High Ground Organics: lettuce, cilantro, cabbage, romanesco, beets, leeks, winter squash, some flowers. From Thomas Farm: some flowers.

Winter Planting Days at High Ground

Saturday, Nov. 22 and Saturday, Dec. 13

Help plant thousands of native rushes, sedges, grasses and wildflowers on High Ground Organics' Conservation Easement. We'll plant from 10–12:30, followed by potluck lunch, warm drinks, and bird watching. Meet at High Ground Organics, 521 Harkins Slough Rd. in Watsonville. (Note: We will plant rain or shine because the plants are happiest with a little rain. Just bring a good rain jacket and solid shoes!) Call Laura Kummerer (831)761-8694 for more details. (If you can't make these dates, but have time during the week, call Laura to schedule a special time for you to come out.)

Cilantro Slaw, adapted from *Sunset Low Fat Mexican Cookbook*

5–6 cups shredded cabbage	1 cup firmly packed cilantro leaves, minced
¼ cup lime juice	1 TBS each water and honey
½ tsp. cumin seeds, toasted in a small skillet (this step really brings out their flavor!)	Salt and Pepper to taste

In a large non-metal bowl, mix all ingredients together.

Roasted Tomato Soup, from *Gourmet Magazine*, Sept. 2003, recipe submitted by CSA member Alice

4 lb tomatoes, halved lengthwise	6 garlic cloves, left unpeeled
3 TBS olive oil	½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. dried oregano, crumbled	1 medium onion, finely chopped
¼ tsp. black pepper	2 tsp. sugar
2 TBS unsalted butter	3 cups chicken stock or low-sodium broth
½ cup heavy cream	

Put oven rack in middle position and preheat to 350.

Arrange tomatoes, cut sides up, in 1 layer in a large shallow baking pan and add garlic to pan. Drizzle tomatoes with oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast tomatoes and garlic 1 hour, then cool in pan on a rack. Peel garlic. Cook onion, oregano, and sugar in butter in a 6–8-quart heavy pot over moderately low heat, stirring frequently, until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes, garlic, and stock and simmer, covered, 20 minutes. Puree soup in batches in a blender (use caution when blending hot liquids), then force through a sieve into cleaned pot, discarding solids. Stir in cream and salt and pepper to taste and simmer 2 minutes.

Soup can be made 1 day ahead and cooled, uncovered, then chilled, covered. Reheat just before serving.

Events

100-Mile Thanksgiving, Friday November 14 in Palo Alto: Valley of Heart's Delight 3rd annual 100-Mile Thanksgiving Tasting, featuring organic and locally grown Thanksgiving dishes. Call (650) 938-9300 x18 for more information.

Holiday Wreath Making Workshops at the Thomas Farm in Aptos. Workshop dates: November 22nd, November 23rd, December 13th, and December 14th. \$20/wreath. Call or e-mail Jean Thomas to reserve your space: 724-4013 or thomfarm@hotmail.com.