

# Fresh from the Farm

## One Step at a Time Gardens

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Week of October 27, 2008 – Post season #3

### Out in the Field

#### The Hoophouses, Garlic, and Signing up for 2009

**Hoophouses** and “high tunnels” (close, but not exactly the same thing) have received a lot of attention for their capacity to stretch the production season – both forward and backward. Our hoophouse, a 96’ x 28’ structure, consists of 2” diameter aluminum hoops, secured with aluminum trusses. (High tunnels tend to be just hoops without the trusses.) The hoops are anchored in cement. The whole structure is covered by a double layer of 6 ml. plastic. A small blower fan generates a cushion of air between the plastic layers both for insulation and to keep the plastic layers taut, reducing wear and tear from wind whipping. The only heat is generated by the sun. We’ve installed a roll-up garage door and a walk-in door on each end. Tim designed removable side panels (3’ from the ground all along the long sides) for summer ventilation. By late June, we add a shade cloth over the top to buffer the summer heat.

Hoophouses provide protection from early and late cool temperatures as well as the beating spring winds. This moderated environment helps the plants get off to a strong start. They also are great protection from potential damage of hail. Now in this late season, they have extended rather tender crops and serve as a very accessible location for late greens. The protection is equally appreciated by the farmer. Many times this spring, when it was too wet to work outside, we had plenty of chores tending early tomato plants in the hoophouse.

Do you remember those early spinach and lettuces? The hoophouse allows us to get a crop of greens as well as tomatoes, eggplant and green peppers off to an early start. We planted a 2<sup>nd</sup> and a 3<sup>rd</sup> crop of greens this year. This final greens crop is what we harvested for our last two weeks of market in Mason City and what we will be harvesting next week for our Thanksgiving delivery. This triple cropping of greens was particularly important this year as our field greens were hit very hard by the early June floods. In between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and third crop, we added some worm castings to boost the soil.



Oct. 15 it turned cold. A quick sweep of remaining field crops, wrestle the side panels back on the hoophouse (in 15-20 mph winds...definitely a two-person job) and wait. The next day revealed that, indeed, it was a killing frost. But in the hoophouse, a haven of green plants remained. We continued to harvest tomatoes, pepper and tender herbs until a second, hard freeze came on Oct. 27. A beautiful crop of lettuce continues while the tomato plants hang limp, having given up their production this season.

Just recently, a fellow North Iowa Farmers Market producer and I were discussing the real potential of hoophouse production to expand local food’s year round supply capacity. He was sharing reports of very large systems. At OSTG, we have plans to research the cost of installing a 2<sup>nd</sup> hoophouse.

As our capacity grows here on the farm and as Iowa’s local food system development grows, I expect you’ll be learning more about hoophouses.

## The Garlic planting

With help from Christa, Luke, and Levi – those who were battling watermelons recently - we completed our garlic planting this week. We calculated as we planted that we were putting approximately 11,000 cloves of garlic in the ground. The rows we planted, if lined up end to end, would stretch out to 0.7 of a mile. The planting went pretty smoothly. An advance crew of 2 or 3 would drop the cloves in the marked rows and the remaining crew would set them in place and press them deep into the soil. [Check website for photo]. One task remains – mulching the garlic. Once that is complete, we wait. Garlic is the first green growth on the farm, pushing its way up through the deep mulch in April. We foliar feed (feeding it through its leaves) the garlic regularly, spraying it with smelly fish emulsion, weed it as needed, snap the garlic scapes in June and harvest it using our bed lifter in early July. Along the way, we've provided our members with an early supply of green garlic, supply of garlic scapes and then regular supplies of garlic late July to the end of deliveries.



## Have you signed up for 2009?

We have had a strong return response from our 2008 members and we are glad to see that. We also have a number of people on our 2009 waiting list. We want to be sure our current members have first opportunity to sign back up for next season. We plan to contact our wait-listed members on Saturday, Nov. 15. Please be sure to sign up if you haven't already!

## What's Cooking

**Wild Rice Soup** – from Lisa Stokke, President, Clear Lake Slow Food Chapter

- 6 T. butter
- 1 T. minced onion
- ½-cup flour
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups cooked wild rice
- ½ t. salt
- 1 cup half and half

Melt butter in saucepan; sauté onion until tender. Blend in flour; gradually stir in broth. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a boil; boil and stir 1 minute. Stir in rice and salt, simmer about 5 minutes. Blend in half-and-half; heat to serving temperature. Garnish with parsley.

## Local Food in the News

**2009 Iowa Network for Community Agriculture (INCA) Annual Local Food Conference comes to North Iowa.**

I am just thrilled to encourage our members, especially those in North Iowa, to plan to attend this special local food event in either Clear Lake or Mason City in February 2009. For years, Tim and I have been involved in local food organizational work, but much of that has been based in other parts of the state. This fall and winter, I am working with a local planning committee and INCA Board members to design and develop a conference like none other.

The day and a half event will take place on Friday, Feb. 6 (half-day workshop) and Saturday, Feb. 7 (full day conference). Mark your calendar now. Complete details will be coming out in the near future.

## Scenes and Seasons around the Farm

It's quiet here now. The other night I listened to the late evening sounds and heard only the distant humming of neighbors' grain dryers. It's been so amazingly pleasant at night that we've lingered late to enjoy the fabulous starry skies...one of the benefits of the relatively dark sky area we live in.