

A Spring in our Step – March 9, 2009

Springtime News from

One Step at a Time Gardens

www.ostgardens.com

Out and About on the Farm

Last Saturday I spent some time at a root cellaring workshop at Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, but the previous weekend was even bigger! The last weekend of February Tim and I actually were out and about *off* the farm. We attended The Organic Farming Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin, along with more than 2,600 other farmers. 2009 was the 20th anniversary of this conference which has grown to become the largest conference for organic producers in the nation. We have attended this conference a number of times over the years and fondly remember some of its early days when it was held in Sinsinawa, Wisc at a home facility for a Catholic order. The meeting space in Sinsinawa was wonderful and the mix of top quality programs and child care have been honored over the years. When we first attended Andrew and Jess participated in their youth programming, including putting on a play about Dr. Suess's Oncler where Jess played the part of the Oncler (proud parents).

We took in a rich array of opportunities at the conference. We have just taken on a new role as mentor for a couple in Sioux Center, Iowa – through the mentoring program of Midwest Organic Sustainable Education Services (MOSES), the conference coordinating organization – and got oriented to this new venture with our mentees at a pre-conference session on Thursday. On Friday and Saturday, Tim and I split up each workshop session to get the most out of what was offered and met between sessions to compare notes. We enjoyed a play by the kids at this year's conference and then took some turns on the dance floor to a local bluegrass band. We met new friends as well as spied a number of lowans in attendance. 2,600 people is a lot of people!

We are continuing to work on soil management strategies and several workshops were particularly helpful on this topic. We gained some really fascinating understanding about the interconnection between roots and soil microorganisms which I'll share in the next note (keeps you hanging on the edge of your seat, eh?). Interestingly we could identify several themes that seems to percolate up through the sessions; one was around the issue of input substitution in organic agriculture, another about the importance of understanding origin of vegetable crops as speaks to their cultural practices (Mediterranean herbs like rosemary, thyme, etc., for example, like conditions - soil with good drainage – similar to their Mediterranean origin). And finally, two keynote speakers, Dr. Vandana Shiva and Dr. Alan Greene offered much food for thought.

Oh, there's lots of good material here to share! Don't be surprised if various threads from this conference show up in future newsletters.

One of the things farmers do in the winter is think and plan! Continuing education opportunities start in November and continue well into the spring. We pass on the November events as we still have much crop management and field work. We count the La Crosse conference as our last big outing, but we still have several more local meetings on our calendar this spring!



Along the way, our first seedlings have sprouted – aren't they cute! The little broccoli sprouts pictured here emerged overnight and were looking a bit pale in the morning. We turned on their lights and by evening they were a bright green! Gotta be amazed at that photosynthetic process!

2009 Membership Update

Why does renewing early and recruiting friends matter?

Membership renewal and recruitment is one of the most important support farm members can offer the farm at this time of year before you are busied with weekly vegetables to use. What you do to help the farm meet its membership goal is more valuable than you may realize.

Did you know our farm membership program makes up 80% of our business? Our members get the top selection ahead of farmers markets and the wholesale markets we serve. Our planting plan and harvest schedule is based upon member deliveries first and foremost. Isn't it nice to be pampered? One of the strengths of a community supported farm is that this is a two-way street and we also look to you for some pampering. As we move toward April and May we will become more and more focused on planting and season preparation demands. Having memberships come in early allows us to get accounts settled and have peace of mind about our goal.

Since the Feb. 24 Spring newsletter, we've had a very good response and know we're ahead of recruitment levels of a year ago. Interestingly, we do see an increase in memberships receipt as daylight gets longer and when we hit a spell of warm temperatures. We all know both of those ingredients will continue to be in our favor. However...if our members can help us keep ahead of our pace, that allows us to focus our energies on producing the food you are so looking forward to.

If you haven't renewed your membership, please do so this week! If you have – thank you very much. And in both cases, please help spread the word.

Be creative. Use our website. Ask us to mail you some brochures or postcards. Ask friends, church members, work colleagues to join the farm. Ask Jan to come talk with a group you belong to. Be just as persistent as we are and we know we'll achieve our goal. Thanks!

Cooking up Great Taste

Oh... this week I'm featuring a great and super quick soup to put together! We had it just last week. It's also a great example of using what's on hand as you'll see notes about my improvisation. Christy Vilsack, organizer of this cookbook, has been a good promoter of local foods.

White Chili (from Fresh from Terrace Hill)

2 lb. cooked chicken – fresh from One Step at a Time Gardens... of course!

1 – 48 oz. Jar Great Northern Beans – *I just used a couple cups of dry beans, soaked & then cooked them*

1 – 16 oz. Jar mild salsa – *I just made up using canned tomatoes, garlic, and cayenne pepper*

8 oz. Monterey Jack Cheese, grated

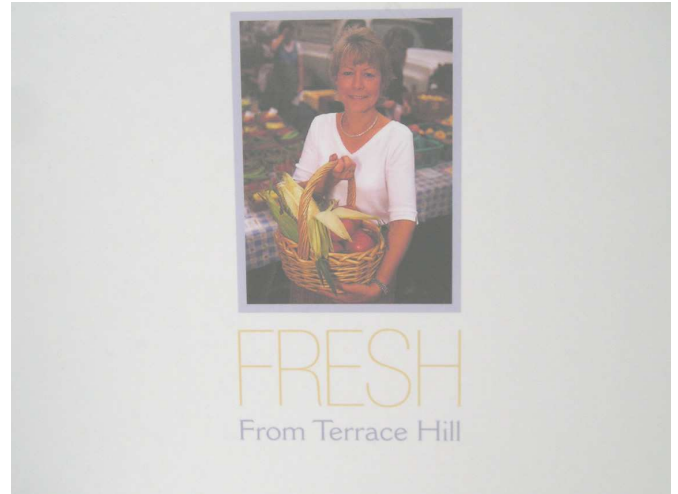
2 t. ground Cumin – *Combine above ingredients, stirring occasionally and adding water or broth if chili becomes too thick (can heat in crock pot too).*

Water or chicken broth, as needed

To serve, label into bowls and garnish with:

Cheddar cheese, sour cream - *Serve with* corn chips for garnish

Serves 6



Next edition of *A Spring in our Step*: March 23, 2009