

# A Spring in our Step – March 23, 2009

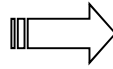
Springtime News from

One Step at a Time Gardens

[www.ostgardens.com](http://www.ostgardens.com)

## Out and About on the Farm

*Two weeks ago we showed you newly germinated broccoli. This week those young plants have been moved out to the greenhouse and are sprouting their first true leaves.*



*3/21 – cleaned out greenhouse and moved more than 15 flats out there. The chickens soon found the new wood chips we put down for something wonderful to scratch around.*

*3/24 – first third of the greenhouse is full and we juggle flats daily as new ones germinate and older ones are moved outdoors.*

### Getting to the root of our food

Some farmers love to point out the most important livestock they manage is not even visible – the soil microorganisms! Organic farming begins with the soil and in my last note I left you with the cliffhanger that this time I'd share a bit about the fascinating interconnection between roots and soil microorganisms.

In a handful of soil, you can have more than a billion living organisms – bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, arthropods, and earthworms to name a few. Each plays a unique role in the complex life cycle that takes place in the soil. For this time, I just want to focus on the fungi. These microscopic organisms convert hard-to-digest organic material into forms other organisms can use. Of the three groups of fungi – *decomposers or saprophytic fungi*, *mutualistic or mycorrhizal fungi*, and *pathogen or parasitic fungi* - let's look at mycorrhizal fungi.

*Myco* – relates to fungi and *rhizal* relates to root. The relationship between mycorrhizal fungi and plant roots is a particularly fascinating. Micorrhiza is unlike either fungi or roots alone. Most trees and agricultural crops depend on or benefit substantially from mycorrhiza. These fungi colonize plant roots, and in exchange for the carbon the fungi get from the roots, the fungi bring key nutrients, including phosphorous, nitrogen, micronutrients, and water to the plant. Fungal

hyphae, long threads of microscopic fungi cells, also bind soil particles together, creating stable aggregates that improve water holding capacity. When we see mushrooms, the fruiting bodies of fungi, on the forest floors, for example, that's just a hint of the activity going on below the surface. Fascinating! So this summer when you receive the great food from the farm, remember to thank the fungi!

## 2009 Membership Update

Memberships continue to come in, but we remind our members of the important role they play. If every member helped recruit just one additional member, we'd both benefit. You'd benefit with a thank you of \$10 credit we offer. We'd benefit by settling those members in before we get really busy in the field. As you think about drumming up your \$10 credit, you can encourage your new recruit to take advantage of our Early Bird Discount up until April 1. No time to waste!

If you haven't signed up for the 2009 season, do so today! Thanks to the many members who have signed up in the past two weeks!

## Cooking up Great Taste

**Lentil Tomato Stew** (from Relish Magazine)

3 Slices Bacon, *cook, cool, crumble* - optional

Celery stalk, *chop*

1 Onion, *chop*

1 Carrot, *chop*

1 Garlic clove, *mince*

1 Qt. Tomatoes, fresh or canned

4 C. Vegetable broth *Bring to boil*

1 C. Lentils *Simmer until lentils are done.*

*Season with oregano, basil and thyme.*

*Crumble bacon on top.*

Makes 8 cups

*A few notes from the cook: I found the bacon got a bit in the way and would omit it next time I make this. I put in a dollop of pesto as all of our summer basil has been made into pesto for storage.*

*Next time I'll feature a web link with lots of great resources for farm members. Lots of recipes that are dairy and gluten free! Stay tuned.*

## News and Opportunities

Do come out for **The Stories on Our Plates** at this Saturday's, **Practical Farmers of Iowa District 2 meeting** – Saturday, March 28 starting at 5:30 p.m. , Dows Community Center.

You don't have to be a PFI member to attend, but you might want to be by the time you leave!

This spring gathering is a great time to get to know others in the area who are committed to sustainable agriculture. With help from Riki Saltzman, Folklorist with the Iowa Art Council, we'll explore the cultural stories we serve up each time we sit down to a meal.

Bring a potluck dish and its story from your family heritage to share , and your own eating ware. Beverages will be provided.

**Closing thought about Spring** – It was official on Friday, March 20 – Spring has arrived!

Daily we are awash in bad news. It taints our outlook in subtle ways. A walk across the farm last week sent shafts of light and possibility into my consciousness, reminding me that as our slogan says – we are committed to raising healthy food...and raising hope. Connection to such a lively landscape as exists around the farm is indeed, hopeful. I suspect you too are bumping into the gift of hope on warm spring days.

**Next edition** of *A Spring* in our Step: April 6, 2009