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BAYFIELD FOODS CSA

Community Supported Agriculture



Selecting the Perfect Product

BRIAN CLEMENTS - NORTHCROFT FARM

Just like apples have Honeycrisps, Macintosh, Granny Smiths, and a million other varieties, every vegetable has a wide selection of varieties. Choosing the right one to grow can be a challenge. Every Christmas when the catalogs come for the next year, it's always tempting to look at the pictures and choose the prettiest looking tomato. I won't say I've never succumbed, but with farming there are a lot of factors to consider when selecting what to grow.

This year, in conjunction with UW-Extension, several farms in the area participated in a series of variety trials. Bayfield Apple Company participated in a melon trial and Great Oak Farm participated in a carrot, melon and cauliflower trial. At Northcroft Farm, I was part of a carrot and cauliflower trial.

The cauliflower trial was the most interesting to me, as I grow a lot of it. Cauliflower is a particularly tricky crop. It needs high fertility soil, a reduction in daylight from planting to harvest,

lots of water until the head starts to form - and then no water on the head. In addition, while the plants are hardy in frosty weather, the edible flowers are not.

The trial at Northcroft evaluated the cauliflower plants for a variety of traits, including: the size, yield, disease resistance, ability to hold in the field, pest resistance and self-wrapping habit. The self-wrapping habit is one of the most important factors. Normal white cauliflower doesn't like sun on the flowers. Sunlight results in a purple hue which does not affect the flavor but makes them harder to sell. Some varieties of cauliflower have leaves that wrap around the flower protecting it from the sun. My main variety is Snow Crown, and while it has lots of good characteristics, it does not self-wrap. I need to come through the field every few days to break leaves over the top of the flowers, to prevent discoloration. More recently, and partly for aesthetics, cauliflower have been bred to come in a variety of colors. The colored varieties, since they are already colored, do not have the issues with sunlight that the white cauliflower has. Self-wrapping does have another benefit. Since cauliflower is a late season crop, it bumps up against fall freezes. Cauliflower with a self-wrapping habit perform better in the late fall as the leaves wrapped around the flower protect the flower from light freezes. The down side of self-wrapping is that tight leaves can trap water on the flower and create an environment where disease can grow.



A row of arugula in the Northcroft hoophouse.



Northcroft arugula, coming up nicely! This arugula is available in this week's boxes.



Fresh harvested from Northcroft trials - De Purple, Flame Star and Denali cauliflower.

So, what did I take away from my trials?

De Purple - Gorgeous purple color, good wrapping ability, consistent head size between 2 and 3#, holds well in the field but bruises very easily in harvest.

Denali - Big plant, takes a long time to mature. Good wrapping ability, huge 5-6# heads.

Flame Star - A light yellow variety, consistent head at about 2-3#, decent wrapping ability, prone to disease.

Clementine - Dark yellow - looks like cheese, earliest variety, poor wrapping, variable head size, little disease.

Puntaverde - A Romanesco variety. It is green, late maturing, holds well in the field, resistant to disease and pests but head size is variable.

In addition to the formal trials I participated in this year, I also did some trials of my own looking for some new crops to add variety to what I produce. Positive arugula results have meant I'm able to offer it through the CSA and feel good about my ability to produce it reliably. I am also experimenting with baby leaf beet, kale and chard greens, and 3 new pepper varieties (an ancho poblano pepper and 2 snacking peppers, Eros and Cupid, which I was very pleased with). Every year brings something new and I am looking forward to introducing the new and improved products over the next couple years as I keep experimenting.

Thank you all for your support.

Brian

Arugula Pesto Pizza with Butternut Squash

INGREDIENTS:

INSTRUCTIONS:

Pesto:

- 3 cups lightly packed fresh arugula, tough stems removed
- ¾ cup pepitas or pecans
- ½ to ¾ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, to taste
- 2 to 3 garlic cloves, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Rest of the pizza:

- 2 pizza crusts, or dough for 2 pizzas
- 5 ounces chilled Ewe Rascal Ewe sheep milk cheese
- 1 small butternut squash
- Garnishes: More pepitas, arugula and some red pepper flakes for sprinkling on top

1. Preheat oven to 500 degrees F.
2. Using a vegetable peeler, peel the outside of your butternut, then peel long ribbons of butternut, enough to generously top two 11-inch pizzas. Toss butternut ribbons with olive oil, salt and pepper.
3. For pesto: In a food processor, combine the arugula, pepitas, Parmesan, garlic, lemon juice and salt. Pulse while drizzling in the olive oil. Season with pepper.
4. Lightly oil the outer edge of the pizza dough with olive oil. Spread each pizza with half of the pesto. Then crumble half of the cheese over each pizza using a fork. Arrange the butternut ribbons on top. Top each pizza with a sprinkling of pepitas.
5. Bake pizza until the crust is golden and the butternut ribbons are caramelizing on the edges (about 10 on a baking sheet). Top each pizza with a light sprinkle of fresh arugula and, if desired, a dash of red pepper flakes. Slice and serve.

