

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

June 2007

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



Growing Herbs

Spice up your cooking with a harvest of herbs

The selection at farmers' markets in early spring is often limited to what can be picked in May and June: asparagus, salad greens, rhubarb, and strawberries. Other crops that can be planted and harvested within a few short weeks are the many kitchen herbs that add flavor and dimension to our dishes. While farmers sometimes bring herbs to the market, you can grow your own harvest of herbs in your yard, in pots, and even on your windowsill. As part of our mission to become more involved with the food we eat, the Belmont Farmers' Market offers tips and techniques for growing culinary herbs.

Opens June 14th!

June through October
Thursday afternoons
2:00 to 6:30 pm

BELMONT CENTER
In the municipal parking lot
behind the Leonard St. stores
off Cross St. & Channing Rd.

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While it may take about one-quarter of an acre to grow sweet corn successfully, and perhaps half a suburban lawn for zucchini or pumpkins, you can grow all the herbs you need in a few square inches of a sunny windowsill. Growing herbs doesn't require much land, but it also doesn't take large quantities of herbs to enliven a dish.

While growing herbs indoors is a sound excuse to buy decorative pots, I have several lovely herbs growing in unglamorous yogurt containers. I feel the best source for indoor herbs is an outdoor clump. Most gardeners are happy to thin out these hardy, spreading perennials and won't mind sharing their bounty, especially in early spring when they are easier to thin. Spring plants will have rooted, but will have not yet encountered insect pests that you wouldn't want to invite indoors. Take a sharp trowel and transfer a discrete section of a clump of the herb into a lightweight container with some potting soil, or wrap the roots in a wet paper towel for later potting at home. If you plan to keep your herbs in pots, spread pebbles or broken bits of clay pot along the bottom of a pot with drainage holes. If you plant in pots without holes for drainage, be sure not to overwater. Otherwise, your plants will drown and the roots will rot. One easy way to plan your watering for small pots without drainage

holes is to become familiar with the weight of the pot when properly watered. Then you can tell by the heft of the pot whether it feels light and needs more water.

Optimal moisture content varies widely for different herbs. Basil, for example, prefers a fairly constantly moist and full nutrient soil with plenty of nitrogen. Rosemary, a Mediterranean plant, will thrive in dry, sandy soil. Mint is flat out hard to kill no matter what you do to it. A little research online or in a good reference book will tell you how much watering and what sort of soil your herbs require.

What should you do if your basil or parsley turns straggly and yellow? Before you make a self-diagnosis of a black thumb, consider a few remedies. Try putting your plant outside, either in the ground or in its pot, and let it live outdoors. There it may thrive with more sun, more diverse soil conditions, and perhaps the help of beneficial insects for pollination or possible mite control.

Although somewhat counter-intuitive, it is also true that many plants require a degree of stress for robust leaf production. Just as tough life lessons build character, pinching off old leaves and even small branches encourages plants to grow. A struggling

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An Interview with Frances Moore Lappé

Belmont resident Frances Moore Lappé shot to fame in 1971 with her best-selling book *Diet for a Small Planet*, which advocated vegetarianism and responsible use of the Earth's resources. The founder, with her daughter Anna Lappé, of the Cambridge-based Small Planet Institute (www.smallplanetinstitute.org) recently talked to us about sustainable agriculture and individual action.

BFM: Does sustainable agriculture play a large part in your research on the economics of food, and, if so, how?

FML: Very much! Thirty-seven years ago, when I began, my wake-up call was the realization that human beings are actually creating scarcity out of plenty! Today's industrial, extractive food system generates both enormous waste and pollution. And it is heating the planet. Agriculture contributes over a fifth of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Livestock outstrip transport as a contributor to harm from greenhouse gas emissions. Starting with food, we can see what is wrong with our world economic and political systems today.

I have just completed a chapter on world hunger for a sociology textbook to be published by Oxford University Press where I dispel the myth that sustainable production yields less food. In the research, I found new evidence for what I'd intuited and written about years ago: working with nature, we realize its abundance. In organic farming, carbon emissions per acre are from one-half to two-thirds less than industrial, chemical agriculture. And one recent interdisciplinary study from the University of Michigan concludes that, if we converted the entire world's agriculture to organic methods, output could increase by over 50 percent.

BFM: Is it better to buy organic food that has come from long distances or should we buy conventional food grown by our local farmers?

FML: This is not an easy question at all. The problem of pesticides is not just for eaters and producers, but is a broader ecological problem. I try to buy local organic food whenever I possibly can. From the point of view of fossil fuels heating the planet, it's more important to buy local produce even if it's not organic. From the point of view of helping the lives of farm workers and saving

the environment from pesticide pollution, then buying organic has an extremely high value. Overall, we need to create a demand in the market for organic produce and local availability.

BFM: What can the average Belmont citizen do to improve and sustain the world that we live in?

FML: It's in the choices that we make, whether it's eating low on the food chain or being more responsible in the way we live: reducing our own purchases, our own consumption, and our own carbon emissions. Those are all things that we as individuals can do. They are limited but they are extremely important. The more we align our own life choices and values, the stronger and more effective we become as a people. We must change the logic of this one-rule economics—by that I mean the single driver of highest return to shareholders and executive—that's driving the concentration of power and destroying our planet. In order to do this, we have to join with others. This is why getting involved is very important. Everyone should look deeply inside themselves, listen to their own questions — that's what changed my life forever — and connect with other people, whether this is through purchasing a CSA, buying local produce or getting money out of our political system. The key is to connect with other people. Alone we cannot turn the spiral of destruction to the spiral of health; alone it will be very difficult for us to do the work that we need to do to get to the root of the problem. The motto of The Small Planet Institute sums up our learning for all the energized people we're meeting all over the planet: hope is not what we find in evidence; it is what we become in action.

—Carlha Vickers for the Belmont Farmers' Market Committee, March 30, 2007



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2007 Vendors

- **Busa Farm** produce
- **ButterBrook Organic Farm** herbs, vegetables, honey, flowers, eggs
- **Coutts Specialty Foods** jams, jellies, applesauce, relishes
- **Dick's Market Garden Farm** produce
- **The Farm School/Maggie's Farm** certified organic vegetables, fruits, flowers, soap, grass-fed meat
- **Fiore di Nonno Cheese** handcrafted fresh mozzarella
- **Gretta Anderson - Belmont CSA** produce grown in Belmont
- **Janique's Madeleines** fresh French cookies made in Belmont
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, pies, honey
- **Leslie Wolf Baking** baked goods from a Belmont kitchen
- **Nashoba Brook Bakery** bread
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **NorthStar Farm** perennials
- **Not Your Ordinary Farm** grass-fed meat
- **Shootflying Hill Sauce Co.** dessert sauces
- **Stillman's at the Turkey Farm** grass-fed meat
- **Taza Chocolates** chocolate ground locally from direct-purchased beans
- **Thoreau Foods** organic cereals, toppings, smoothie boosters
- **Toscanini & Sons** bread and baked goods
- **Underwood Greenhouse** potted plants grown in Belmont
- **Waverley Place** flowers, herbs and perennials grown in Waltham
- **West Elm Farm** soap, candles, wool products

Food for Thought

Belmont residents share their passion for fresh food, farmers' markets, and good living

On this bright spring morning, I've traded my laptop for a platter of mud and my minivan for a tractor. Gretta Anderson is planting her crops down on an acre of Ogilby land at Sergi's Farm, Belmont's last working agricultural land. Her Community Supported Agriculture operation is in its second year, and my family has bought a share of her harvest. From May through September, we'll drop by the farm to claim our share of each week's harvest of fresh, sustainably grown, and decidedly local produce.

Our share in the harvest brings with it the chance to share in the work. And truthfully, the chance to get dirt under my fingernails, right here in Belmont, was as appealing as the promise of produce.

So when Gretta asked for volunteers to help with seeding in the greenhouse on School Street, I showed up. When the seedlings were ready to be moved to larger trays, I grabbed my gardening gloves. With spring here at last, the seedlings are ready to make their final move into the warming ground, and I wanted to help.

This year Gretta invested in a tractor to turn the ground and pull her transplanter. A sturdy, simple construction, the transplanter consists of three heavy iron wheels with v-shaped points every few inches around the rim. As the tractor moves, the wheels roll, the points on the wheels press divots into the ground in three straight lines, and water drips down into each divot, moistening the soil for the seedlings.

As Justin, Gretta's assistant farmer, drives the tractor forward at a slower-than-strolling pace, I and another novice sit in seats attached to the back of the transplanter, each with a tray of seedlings on our laps. Our job is to remove a seedling with its rootball intact with the right hand, pass it to the left hand, and then place a baby spinach in each divot in the three rows as the tractor pulls us over the planting bed.

The tricky part is that there are three rows of divots and just two of us. We each manage

to fill the rows running right beneath us, but can't seem to manage to also fill the third, middle row. Beginning to feel like Lucy and Ethel in the candy factory, my planting partner and I call out to Justin to put the brakes on while we catch up. Gretta inspects our work, teaching us the finer points of farming as she does.

"Just pinch the soil over the roots. Don't pat it, or you'll be planting weed seeds, too." I try harder.

"Don't worry about the seedlings that get pulled off their roots. That's why we seed more than we'll need." I nibble a ruined spinach seedling before tossing it aside. It's delicious.

"You're doing great!" Gretta cheers us on. Perhaps we are getting the hang of this. Or perhaps she's just very patient and hopes we'll return to help another day.

I will be back, without a doubt. At home, stamping the mud off my boots, it's hard to believe I've spent the morning farming just a few blocks away. Yet my sense of satisfaction with those hours is unquestionable.

Why does the work of growing our own food feel so right? Perhaps the answer lies in part because I know absolutely—because I was there—that no harm was done on my family's behalf. No land or water was polluted with pesticides or chemical fertilizers. No fossil fuels were used to transport our food. The overall cost of our spinach and peas and kohlrabi is exactly what we paid for with our CSA share and with our own time and effort in the greenhouse and on the field. There are no vast hidden costs to be swallowed along with our meals, no damage that I, however indirectly, caused.

And that makes good food taste even better.
--Gale Pryor

Note: Gretta Anderson will offer her Belmont-grown produce at the Belmont Farmers' Market this season, as well as CSA shares in her fall and winter harvests.

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plant may be rootbound and may need to be moved to a bigger pot with a dose of fresh potting soil. The change will allow more air to reach its roots and may accomplish wonders. Though it is more work to repot than to add fertilizer, I find it is almost always more successful. Repotting will stress the roots, but it will also encourage a surge of new growth, first in the roots and then in the foliage.

Finally, consider how long you have kept this particular plant. Remember, basil and parsley are annuals, and so may well be past their prime after six months. Even most perennials need to be replaced or renewed every few years.

Herb plants are easy to acquire, to care for, and to pass on to other gardeners. Your friends will certainly be impressed when you pinch off fresh chives for their soup from your own kitchen garden.

—Christina Kimball

What's Fresh in... June

look for these seasonal crops this month

arugula
asparagus
escarole
flowers
green onions
honey
kale
lettuces
(butterhead, frisee, leaf, romaine, cos)
herbs
radishes
raspberries
rhubarb
spinach
sugar snap peas
strawberries
baby summer squash

Pesto? Presto!

Basil is the key ingredient in classic Italian pesto, yet pesto simply means "to pound" or "to grind" and can be made with almost any fresh herb you happen to have in quantity. Here is a pesto made with a garden of herbs:

1 cup basil leaves, loosely packed
1 cup parsley leaves, loosely packed
1/2 cup mint leaves, loosely packed
1/4 cup marjoram or oregano leaves, loosely packed
1 tablespoon finely chopped rosemary leaves
1 tablespoon finely chopped tarragon leaves
1/2 cup coarsely chopped walnuts
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more to serve with pesto if desired
2 cloves garlic, sliced, or more if desired
1/2 cup olive oil

Combine herbs in a food processor and pulse until chopped and mixed. Add garlic, lemon juice, and olive oil. Pulse again. Add cheese. Pulse. Serve with hot pasta, fish, or crusty bread. Serves 4.



Tuesday night at the Movies

Assembly Room, Belmont Public Library

Please join us on June 12 at 6:30 p.m. for *The Future of Food*, the first of BFM's summer movie series. Directed by Deborah Koons Garcia, the film is a documentary on the revolution taking place in the farm fields and on the dinner tables of America. "One of 2005's must-see documentaries"—*San Francisco Chronicle*. Watch for more movies coming July 10, August 14, and September 11, the second Tuesday of each month throughout the summer.

Music at the Market

June 14th, Opening Day, 2:30 pm

Benjamin M., Chenery Middle School, trumpet fanfare

June 21st, 4:00 pm

Julia L., Chenery Middle School, violin

June 28th, 2:30 pm

Pilar and Devon Hincapie, classical violin duos



The BFMC needs your help! Volunteer for market days or behind the scenes activities. Meet interesting people while supporting your community. Contact belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.com