

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers'

autumn 2007

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



What will you eat this winter?

The benefits of buying locally when the farmers' markets are closed

For the past two years, Gretta Anderson has been farming a one-acre plot of Belmont land at the back of the Richardson (a.k.a. Sergi) Farm. In addition to her skills as a diversified, New England market gardener, Gretta has put a lot of thought into the theory and practice of local agriculture, including how farmers and their customers may continue to support each other through the winter.

One innovative concept, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) allows Gretta and other small farmers to enter the farming business with very little capital. Consumers joining a CSA pay for a share of the harvest to come. Along with the farmers, shareholders assume some of the risk of farming: the amount, and thus the value, of the produce in a share will be greater than the price of the share in a season of good weather and few pests, but may be lower if nature does not cooperate. The Belmont summer CSA has been sold out in both years Gretta has offered it. Last summer she offered 25 shares, and this summer, she has been able to fill the baskets of 50 shareholders.

This year Gretta has coordinated with two other farms, Vanguarden CSA in Dover, MA, and Picadilly Farm in Winchester, NH, to supply a winter CSA share to extend the season that Belmont residents are able to eat produce grown close to home. You may wonder, what on earth would be in a winter share?

Local eating in Massachusetts during the cold months can still be diverse! Several varieties of cold-hardy greens grow late into the season. Winter squash will keep for months in a cool but not freezing space. Kale is a

notoriously hardy winter green, and Brussels sprouts actually improve in taste with a light frost. Historically, farmers and even household gardeners extended the season by preserving fragile produce and growing less perishable foods such as dried beans, grains, and popcorn. Produce to be offered in the Belmont Winter CSA shares includes storage vegetables: carrots, celeriac, parsnips, potatoes, red onions, sweet potatoes, turnips, winter squash, and yellow onions. Cabbage, collard greens, and kale will also make appearances, as the season allows, along with locally grown cracked wheat and popcorn.

Growing cold-hardy crops, growing crops under row covers or in an unheated greenhouse, and using root cellars for storage are all ways to extend the season for vegetables in the northeast through the early winter.

Eating locally as much and as long as possible has gotten a lot of press lately, spurred by Barbara Kingsolver's eloquent best-selling book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*. There is even a name for those who choose to adopt, either in part or in whole, a locally sourced diet: Locavore.

Those committed to eating locally know that it benefits the consumer, the farmer, and the environment. Consumers know where their food comes from, even seeing the land, the fields, and the very plants on which their vegetables grow. They learn directly from their farmers about fertilization, irrigation, pest control, and the pros and cons of organic certification. Farmers tend to be generous with their knowledge, their stories, and their insights about growing crops. Many, includ-

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In the municipal parking lot
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In this issue . . .

**How to buy local in the winter
Keeping the Harvest: tips for
canning and preserving**

**Food for Thought: The very local egg
2006/2007 Apple dessert contest winners**

Keeping the Harvest

A brief overview of food preservation methods

The bounty of summer and the approach of winter provide a compelling argument for preserving as much of the harvest as possible. In the past, when people were dependent upon their gardens and ate according to the seasons, preserving food was commonplace. "Putting food by" – an old expression – can be rewarding and satisfying today for anyone who wishes to recapture the warmth of summer and the flavor of freshly picked food. It must be done carefully to assure food safety. Be sure to consult a reliable reference or ask a seasoned expert for details. These are a few time honored ways to preserve food.

Canning

Traditional canning preserves food in glass jars by heating to the point of sterility, killing microorganisms, and by sealing the contents. The acidity of food keeps microorganisms away until the jar is opened again. Thus, tomatoes are a popular choice for canning. One easy way to save a crop of tomatoes for winter is to choose ripe, unblemished tomatoes, remove the stems, and roast them in a 350 degree oven for 45 minutes. Then transfer the hot tomatoes to sterilized canning jars, leaving half an inch of air space on the top and removing all bubbles. Add some liquid if necessary and close the canning jars with sterilized lids. Place jars in a canning pot and cover with 2 or 3 inches of water above the jars. Keep at a gentle boil for 45 minutes. When the water is cool, remove the canning jars and leave at room temperature for a day. The next day check that the seals on the lids are still tight. Store jars in a cool, dry, dark place. Properly stored, canned food should remain safe to eat for at least one year.

Drying

Drying removes as much water as possible from food. The dryer the food, the longer it will last. Many cultures simply dry their food under the sun for a few days. In wet New England, a dehydrator makes more sense. This device circulates hot air through stacks of trays, drawing moisture out of food and intensifying the flavor. Slice ripe apricots, peaches, or apples as thinly as possible. Spread the slices across the trays in a single layer and turn on the dehydrator for several hours or as long as a day, depending on the day's humidity and the moisture content of the fruit. Then

store the food in sealed plastic bags or jars in a dry place.

Fermentation

Fermentation relies on friendly microorganisms to produce lactic acid and to create an acidic medium that will prevent the growth of undesirable microorganisms. Thousands of years ago, humans mastered the fermentation method, the source of wonderful foods such as bread, cheese, yogurt, wine, and pickles. When foods are fermented, the nutritional content improves (sauerkraut has more vitamin C than cabbage), digestibility increases (as in yogurt), or they become safer to consume (in medieval Europe, wine was safer to drink than water).

To make sauerkraut, thinly slice several heads of cabbage and sprinkle with sea salt to draw the water out of the cabbage and to create the brine in which it will ferment. Pack the sliced, salted cabbage tightly into a wide-mouth crock. Cover it with a plate and place a heavy object on top of the plate; the weight will force water out of the cabbage. Make sure the cabbage is submerged in liquid. Cover with a cheesecloth. Check it every day or two until it starts to taste tangy. When the taste reaches the level of tanginess you want, it is ready. You can transfer it to the refrigerator, where it will continue to ferment more slowly.

Freezing and root cellaring are other useful ways to make the harvest last through the winter. All methods preserve nutrients to varying degrees, or even increase them as in fermentation. Whichever method you choose to use, consult a reference (see below) to ensure you are doing it safely. The harvest awaits you—all year long.

- For questions on canning, see <http://www.freshpreserving.com/pages/faq/42.php>
- Amazon.com sells the Ball® Home Canning Basic Kit, which is all you need to get started.
- For a general reference on food preservation including building a root cellar, see www.uga.edu/nchfp
- For a workshop on home preservation methods, see www.mhof.net/workshops/index.php

– Andres Aguirre



www.belmontfarmersmarket.org

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Our 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
- **Hi-Rise Bakery** fresh breads baked in Cambridge
- **Janique's Madeleines** fresh French cookies made in Belmont
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, pies, honey
- **Merrimack Valley Apiary** many varieties of honey
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **NorthStar Farm** perennial plants and cheeses made in Westport, MA
- **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
- **The Biscuit** bread and baked goods
- **Thoreau Foods** organic cereals, toppings, smoothie boosters
- **Underwood Greenhouse** potted plants grown in Belmont
- **Waverley Place** flowers, herbs and perennials grown in Waltham



Food for Thought

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

Chickens in Belmont - The Very Local Egg

You may be surprised to learn it is legal to keep chickens in Belmont and that a number of families around town have welcomed chickens to their backyards. It is quite possible chickens are already living in a backyard near you, where they are happily clucking away and delivering breakfast daily to their owners in return for chicken feed, insects, and weeds. While there may be many reasons to become a chicken owner and raise these colorful pets in your Belmont backyard, here are a few to consider.

Chickens lay eggs. This is the most delicious benefit. Hens do not need a rooster to enable or encourage them to produce eggs; however, the eggs would be infertile and cannot hatch. There is no difference in appearance or flavor between fertile or infertile eggs. The eggs that your hens lay will not only be fresher and tastier than commercial eggs, but they will also be healthier.

Chickens connect you with the food supply. Few protein-rich foods are as local as eggs collected from your own backyard. Eating eggs that you raise yourself connects your family to the food supply in a very direct way that is at once satisfying, rewarding, and educational.

Chickens are inexpensive to keep. They eat chicken feed and leftovers, and they leave you eggs in return. Collecting eggs for chicken feed is not a bad bargain.

Chickens require little space. A general rule of thumb for determining space in a chicken coop for a backyard flock is at least four square feet of space per hen and at least 10 square feet of space in an outdoor run. That means that the space that chickens need can easily be found within the average-sized Belmont backyard.

Chickens produce manure. If you do not think this is a benefit, you are probably not a gardener. Find a gardener who may be very glad to clean out your coop for you in exchange for this gardening treasure.

Chickens speed up composting. Instead of putting your food leftovers directly into your compost bin, feed them to the chickens first, and then add the manure to the compost pile. Not surprisingly, chicken manure turns into compost faster than "unprocessed" food wastes.

It is easy to care for chickens. It takes only a few minutes each day to feed chickens and collect the eggs. Coop bedding does not need to be changed very frequently and is a valuable addition to a compost pile.

In addition to these reasons to consider keeping some backyard hens, you may also enjoy connecting with other Belmont chicken owners for further information through a Yahoo web group. Group members will be happy to talk about their chickens at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BelmontChicken/>

The Town of Belmont does require an inspection and a permit from the Belmont Health Department to keep hens. It does not permit keeping roosters. For more specific details and information, contact the Health Department at (617) 993-2720.

– Joan Teebagy

Let us hear from you!

After the 2007 Market's end, the BFMC will meet with the Board of Selectmen to evaluate this season and consider operation of the Farmers' Market for 2008. Your opinions are important! Please send us your comments and suggestions. Did the Market fulfill your social and shopping needs? Did it contribute to your sense of Belmont as a community? Can you suggest changes or improvements? Did you attend our Food on Film program, and should it continue after the Market closes? Contact us by email to Belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.org or by snail mail to Belmont Farmers' Market Committee, P.O. Box 387, Belmont, MA 02478. Thank you!

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ing Gretta, are eager to share their opinions about the connections among local sustainable agriculture, community food security, self-reliant regional food systems, and issues of social, environmental and economic justice in their community. Buying locally and getting to know your farmer can improve your quality and appreciation of life. And you real-

ize that the environmental cost of transporting that food long distances has been saved.

New England farmers can extend their season by using techniques to continue growing and storing vegetables in colder months, and by creating and marketing value added, less perishable farm products to market in

the non-intensive growing season. Eaters can continue to reap the rewards of eating produce grown close to home by purchasing a share in a winter CSA, visiting farm stands open during the winter months, and staying in touch with your favorite market vendors even when the Belmont Farmers' Market is closed for the season.

– Christina Kimball



Award-winning apple desserts!

Grand prize winners of the Farmers' Market contests

2006

Easy Apple Pie

Becca Tananbaum

Ingredients

- 5 apples, or more if needed
- handful of fresh cranberries (optional)
- ½ c. sugar
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- 1 egg, beaten
- ½ c. sugar
- 6 tbsp. butter, melted
- ¾ c. flour
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- ½ c. chopped pecans or walnuts

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
 Fill a nine-inch pie plate even with brim with thinly sliced apples. Add cranberries, if desired. Mix ½ cup sugar with cinnamon and sprinkle over apple slices. Combine egg, remaining sugar, flour, butter, vanilla, and nuts. Spread mixture over apple slices. Bake in 350-degree oven for 50 minutes or until lightly browned.

– Adapted from the Beth El Temple Center Cookbook

2007

Apple Crostada

Larry Weathers

Crust

Mix together 1½ c. white flour, ¼ tsp. baking powder, and ¼ tsp. salt. Add and cut in ½ c. butter and 2 tsp. sugar. Add, tossing lightly, 1 egg beaten with 2 tbsp. ice water and 1 tsp. vinegar.

Roll dough on a floured surface or between plastic or waxed paper and chill while preparing topping. Dough will be thin, and can be a free-form rectangle of about 10 x 14 inches or any shape you like.

Topping

Toss 3-4 large peeled apples, thinly sliced, with ¼ cup flour and ½ cup sugar. Sprinkle with 2 tbsp. lemon juice, cinnamon generously, and a dash of vanilla to coat the apples.

Place dough on parchment paper on a cookie sheet. Top with one layer of apple mixture tightly spaced over the entire crust. Sprinkle with ¼ c. additional sugar.

Bake at 400 degrees for 15 minutes, 375 degrees for an additional 15 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove and separate parchment with long knife. Slide onto rack to cool. Best eaten within a few hours. Crust may get soggy overnight.

Many Thanks!

The BFMC is pleased to have partnered with several Belmont businesses this summer for special events such as the Massachusetts Farmers' Market Week celebration and our second Apple Dessert Contest. For their support, we thank: Belmont Toys, Charlesbank Bookshop, and Terra Firma; and Kitchen on Common, Patou Thai, Savinos, and Stone Hearth Pizza restaurants.

Many talented musicians enhanced Thursday markets this summer. We applaud: Benjamin Meyer, Julia L., Devon and Pilar Hincabie, Karen Allendoerfer, Julia M. & Mirella B., Eve D., and the Lockett Family Trio.