

CSA Newsletter, Spring, Week 3

Negovia Carrots
Green Garlic
Adrianna Head Lettuce
Mizuna
Radicchio
Radish Shoots
Strawberries
Tatsoi

The arrival of tatsoi, mizuna and radicchio probably signals a good time for a word on variety.

Why do we even grow this stuff? A huge portion of our customers don't know how to cook it, at market we have to beg the uninitiated to try it and some of it isn't the easiest thing to grow in the world. The answer, in a word, is diversity.

Making a crop diversification a priority serves two purposes. The first of which is the health of the garden.

As easy as it would seem for us to grow only broccoli, carrots, spinach and tomatoes, it would invariably end in ruin for the soil. We grow organically and as closely to the sustainable ideal as we can, so that rules out just spraying overgrown pest populations dead and pumping the dirt full of synthetic fertilizers. Instead, we've gotta take the long-view, and we do that by planting crops that complement each other in sequence and that serve the overall balance of the bugs and the bees of the garden. The idea is that what one crop takes from the soil another puts back in.

The second purpose of garden diversity is your health. Everyone's certainly got their own unique nutritional needs, but, for most of us, the more different things we eat, the better off we are. Eat leaves, eat fruits, eat seeds, eat stalks, eat stems. Eat color. Same as the soil. What one thing lacks another fills in.

They're great for you, and most of us love them, but if you only eat spinach, broccoli and egg whites you are not going to feel very good. Believe me, I tried it. Didn't work out. That's what led me here. :)

Vegetable of the Week: Radicchio

Oh, yes, Mr. Radicchio. How ya been, bud? It's really been too long. I grew up thinking you were a red head of lettuce that mom had let go bad in the fridge, but now that we're friends, I know – you're not salad, you're a leaf chicory, you grew up in El Paso, your favorite holiday is Constitution Day and you need just a little TLC to go from bitter and ornery to perfectly agreeable.

In order to round radicchio's sharp edges a bit you've gotta do a couple of things. First, soak it in ice water.

This'll mellow some of the bitterness but leave the more tolerable earthy chicory undertones. Second, grill it. Radicchio loves the grill. Sautéing in a cast-iron skillet or grill pan is a decent alternative to grilling if you don't have the time or the means. Or, you know, if you're the kind of person who eats 100% cacao dark chocolate or chews on coffee grounds, go ahead and make yourself a raw radicchio salad for lunch...

Recipes:

I know you're probably just gonna put the strawberries on the kitchen counter and watch your family steadily empty the pint over the course of an afternoon, but if you wanna try and make a meal out of them you might try this simple, easy and light salad. You can find all of the fresh ingredients from local producers at our Saturday market at the barn.

Strawberry Pecan Lettuce Mix Salad

1 head lettuce
1/2 bunch mizuna
1/4 cup onion or green onion, chopped
2 tbsp. feta or goat cheese
2 tbsp. pecan pieces
1/2 pint strawberries
4 tbsp. olive oil
2 tbsp. red wine vinegar
1 tsp. dijon mustard

- 1) Place greens in large salad bowl. Sprinkle with onion, cheese, pecan pieces and strawberries.
- 2) Whisk together olive oil, red wine vinegar and dijon mustard, drizzle over salad and toss to combine.

Last note on the radicchio and on making dinner and whatever else you wanna apply it to...

You don't have to use the recipe. Maybe you try half of it, maybe it introduces you to a new ingredient or two, or maybe it inspires you to try something on your own. Go for it! I am far from an expert chef - ask my roommate. When confronted with something new I've always been best served looking around for an idea here or there, sometimes on the internet, sometimes from a friend, and just doing what makes sense in the moment. Sometimes it doesn't work out but a lot of times it does and I always learn something along the way. When in doubt, add your favorite ingredient. Mine's bacon. Just don't get hung up on 'the right way' to do any of this stuff. There is none.

Grilled Radicchio with Mozzarella

1 head radicchio
3 garlic cloves, minced
3/4 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
1 tbsp. fresh thyme
2 cups olive/pecan oil
1/8 cup balsamic vinegar
1/4 lb. mozzarella, cut into 8 pieces
salt + pepper

- 1) Cut the radicchio in quarters lengthwise, being sure to keep some stem attached to each quarter.
- 2) Submerge radicchio in ice water for an hour. Put a plate on top of radicchio to keep under the surface.
- 3) Combine all ingredients, except for the mozzarella, in a bowl, and mix well.
- 4) Drain radicchio and place on towels to absorb water. Open the leaves and spoon the olive oil mixture inside. Place quarters on a baking sheet and pour remaining marinade mixture over them. Season with salt and pepper.
- 5) Grill or cook radicchio over medium heat until browned on the outside but still raw inside, 3 to 5 minutes, turning occasionally.
- 6) When radicchio begins to brown, pull from heat and place a slice of mozzarella inside each. Place back on baking pan and cook for 5 minutes longer to melt cheese. Drizzle with remaining marinade.
- 7) Congratulations, you're eating radicchio!

Have a great week!