

Veggie Box Newsletter

Week 9, April 28

Welcome to week nine of the Spring Veggie Box! Insects and other animal pollinators are vital to the production of healthy crops for food, fibers, edible oils, medicines, and other products. The commodities produced with the help of pollinators generate significant income for producers and those who benefit from a productive agricultural community. Pollinators are also essential components of the habitats and ecosystems that many wild animals rely on for food and shelter. There is evidence that populations of native and managed pollinators are in decline, and the loss of benefits derived from them is being felt by the agricultural community. Human activity such as urbanization can lead to habitat fragmentation or destruction. Changes in agricultural practices and the use of broad-spectrum pesticides can disrupt or destroy long-established pollinator habitats. Other factors leading to pollinator decline include disease, and the spread of invasive plant species. It's unfortunate that the wildlife we care least about provides us with the most functional value. Pollinator insects – bees, wasps, beetles, flies, ants and butterflies – play an important role in agriculture. We might associate crop pollination with honey bees, but a range of studies have shown that non-bee pollinators (such as butterflies, beetles and hoverflies) also play an important role in the pollination of fruits, vegetables, and oil crops.

We always talk about how Veggie Box is more than just your grocery shopping for the week; that it has broader connections with our communities and environment; that it's about sharing responsibility for both our food and for one another. We believe that environmental stewardship and conservation work go hand-in-hand with the values and mission of Veggie Box. Helping to plant native plants, specifically wildflowers, pulling invasive plants, and supporting food production that doesn't use pesticides are all ways you can help support our pollinators. What else could be done? Thank you for supporting local food!

Producer Spotlight

Titus Farms

Titus Farms was founded by Rose and Paul Titus in 1982. Growing up, both farmers worked at their respective family farms until they got married and purchased a small 20 acre land. Paul and Rose both dedicated their lives into farming so that they can pass on ownership of the farm to their daughter Rebecca Titus. Titus farms is dedicated to producing the highest quality vegetables using sustainable organic farming methods, as well as producing unique varieties of vegetables that capitalize on great taste.

Crop Profile

Milkweed - ininiwanzhan / shaaboosigan

Asclepias syriaca, or common milkweed, is a perennial plant that is native to Canada and the US. Milkweed can be found in a multitude of plant communities such as open woods, forest edges, riparian zones, meadows, and prairies. Adult female monarch butterflies lay their eggs on the leaves, which then hatch use the plant as a food source. In addition to monarchs, a variety of other insects forage on common milkweed and contribute to pollination. Anyone with a bit of garden space to spare can help the monarch population recover. In addition to supporting the monarch, milkweed species are important sources of nectar for dozens of other butterflies and numerous pollinating insects such as native bees and honey bees. Plant your milkweed outside this spring after the risk of frost has gone!

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Veggie Box

What's in the Box?

Potted Basil Plants, Hunter Park GardenHouse, Lansing

Organic Spinach, Monroe Family Organics, Alma

Organic Russet Potatoes, Cinzori Farms, Ceresco

Head Lettuce, Blue Mitten Hydroponic Farms, Okemos

Gilfeather Turnip, Titus Farms, Leslie

Organic Parsley, MSU Student Organic Farm, Holt

Potted Milkweed Plant, Kat Logan/Hunter Park GardenHouse, Lansing

Add-Ons

Eggs, Grazing Fields Cooperative, Charlotte

Bread, Stone Circle BakeHouse, Holt

Kombucha, Apple Blossom Kombucha, Lansing

Chevre, Hickory Knoll Farms Creamery, Onondaga

Cheese, Hickory Knoll Farms Creamery, Onondaga

Coffee, The 517 Coffee Company, Lansing

Meat, Heffron Farms Market, Belding

Pork, Grazing Fields Cooperative, Charlotte

Beef, Heffron Farms Market, Belding

Chicken, Heffron Farms Market, Belding

Organic Pinto Beans, Ferris Organic Farm, Eaton Rapids

Recipes and Tips!

Mashed Gilfeather Turnip and Potatoes

2 lbs Veggie Box potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes (all from this week)
1 Veggie Box gilfeather turnip, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
½ cup buttermilk
3 tablespoons butter
Salt and pepper to taste
¼ cup chopped fresh chives

In large pot, bring potatoes, gilfeather turnip, and enough salted water to cover to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 20 minutes, or until fork-tender; drain. Transfer to large bowl. Using hand masher or potato ricer, mash potato mixture until smooth. In pot over medium-high heat, warm buttermilk and butter for 1 minute, or until hot. Stir hot buttermilk mixture into potatoes. Fold in chives; season with salt and pepper.

Parsley Hummus Pasta

1 15oz. can chickpeas
1/4 cup olive oil
1 fresh lemon, or 1/4 cup juice
1/4 cup tahini
1 clove garlic, or 1/4 tsp garlic powder
1/4 tsp ground cumin
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 small onion (from the other week)
Veggie Box parsley (to taste)
8 oz. pasta
Veggie Box spinach

Drain the chickpeas and add them to a food processor along with the olive oil, juice from the lemon (about 1/4 cup), tahini, garlic, cumin, and salt. Pulse the ingredients, adding a small amount of water if needed to keep it moving, until the hummus is smooth. Pull some parsley leaves from the stems. Add to the hummus in the food processor and process again until only small flecks of green remain. Taste the hummus and add more seasoning if needed. Sauté onion, and set aside. Cook 8oz. of your favorite pasta according to the package directions. Reserve one cup of the starchy cooking water, then drain the cooked pasta in a colander. Return the drained pasta, onion, and spinach to the pot with the heat turned off. Add about 3/4 of the hummus to the pasta and stir until the pasta is evenly coated. Add the reserved pasta water as needed to keep the mixture smooth and saucy. Feel free to top with blistered tomatoes, feta, or more chopped parsley!

Traditional Use and Importance of Milkweed

Milkweed, also known as ininiwanzhan in the Ojibwemowin language, and shaaboosigan in the Anishinaabemowin language, has a long and important history in our region. Traditionally this plant was used a gynecological aid to produce post-birth milk flow in the mother. It was also used as a cure for a variety of ailments, such as skin conditions, stomach ailments, chest pains and the the common cold. The young flower buds -before they opened - are edible and are said to taste similar to broccoli. However, the young shoots are also edible and are comparable to asparagus.

Historically, indigenous folks also combined the root with fibers of boneset and applied to a whistle for calling deer when hunting. In eastern North America from 1,000 to 500 years ago, preserved cloth from the time was found to have been made from yarn of milkweed and rabbit fur.

Of course, it's probably most helpful to plant your milkweed plant and continue to let it grow and spread to help our pollinators and our natural environment rather than eating it and using its roots. However, when a natural community is properly maintained and supported by people, there can always be give and take between the flora, fauna, and fungi of a region and the people who inhabit it - a reciprocal, interconnected relationship is how our natural world is meant to be. However, with colonization, consumerism, individualism, climate change, deforestation, and the general destruction of our natural environments, it's time to give more than what we take until the imbalance of power is a little more levelled out.

Caring for Basil

You can keep your basil on a sunny window ledge, or plant them outside! If moving them outside, move seedlings outdoors gradually to harden them off. This allows the basil to adjust to the harsher outdoor conditions. You can plant your basil in the ground once temps reach 70 fairly consistently. Basil thrives in warm temperatures and full morning sun. If you live in an area with scorching midday sun, try to give your basil light shade during the hottest time of day. Water your basil regularly and deeply. Pinch stems (where they branch off) when you harvest rather than picking individual leaves. This encourages your basil to grow full and bushy.