

Veggie Box Newsletter

Spring 2024 · Week 2 · Thursday, March 7th

“What even grows in February?” is a question I get with some frequency when I tell people the start date of Spring Veggie Box — sometimes even from farmers! The truth is: not much. But “not much” isn’t the same as “nothing,” by a long shot. Late winter seasonal eating in mid-Michigan centers around crops that have been stored, and crops that can be grown with season extension techniques.

Storage crops have been waiting for you since last fall’s harvest, when the days were warm but the nights were turning crisp, and the daylight was growing shorter instead of longer. (Fun fact, the hours daylight this week will be the most we’ve had since the first week of October!)

Storage crops include potatoes, root vegetables such as carrots and radishes, winter squash, onions, cabbages, apples, and similar items. Although these foods have a tremendous shelf life under the right conditions, even the hardiest root veggies don’t store forever. Farmers and Veggie Box crew are constantly checking the items in storage and composting any that shows signs of starting to turn. Storage crops in late winter are nearing the end of their shelf life, so you should plan to consume these shortly after you receive them. The flavor will still be delicious!

Other items you receive early in the season are grown under a cover. Most farmers we work with use a hoop house. Unlike a greenhouse, a hoop house is built on curved metal ribs or “hoops,” does not have a foundation, and usually has sturdy plastic sheeting for walls rather than glass or polycarbonate panels. Greens grow nicely in a hoop house. Early brassicas like kale love cool temps and will follow soon, along with quick-maturing crops like radishes. Some varieties of radish take only three weeks to mature from seed! You may also receive crops grown in hydroponic setups, and sometimes even spring-harvested, incredibly sweet carrots which have overwintered in the ground.

If you were lucky enough to be a gardener or Veggie Box member last fall, you may be able to supplement with preserves from last year. This is an excellent time to enjoy jam, frozen veggies or pickles. As the season progresses, we’ll move out of storage crops and into the new, tender crops of spring. Enjoy comfort dishes and the last days of soup season! We won’t see local potatoes again for a few months. But some true treasures will take their place.

Producer Spotlight *Hunter Park GardenHouse*

The Hunter Park GardenHouse, a project of Allen Neighborhood Center, is a hub for year-round farm and garden education, where neighbors volunteer to grow food, flowers, and community, and youth develop job and life skills in service to the neighborhood. Since 2008, the Hunter Park GardenHouse has empowered neighbors to grow, prepare, and eat healthy food to better their health and become better connected with the community.

Crop Profile *Sweet Potatoes*

Sweet potatoes, despite having potato in their name, are actually a part of the morning glory family. Unlike potatoes, the entirety of the sweet potato plant such as its vines and leaves can be eaten. They are extremely nutritious with high levels of Vitamin C and beta-carotene. While sweet potatoes can be grown by seed, they are most commonly grown through propagation of stem or root cuttings, sometimes called slips. This root vegetable is native to the tropical regions of the Americas and spread to be cultivated around the world including China, the Philippines, and Japan in the late 1500s and early 1600s. Because of its prominence around the world, you can find many different recipes for sweet potatoes from cuisines around the world.



What's in the Box?

Potatoes, Hillcrest Farms, *Eaton Rapids*

Sweet Potatoes, Titus Farms, *Leslie*

Microgreens, Hunter Park GardenHouse, *Lansing*

Ida Red Apples, MSU Horticulture Orchards, *Holt*

Organic Onions, MSU Student Organic Farm, *Holt*

Organic Garlic, MSU Student Organic Farm, *Holt*

Add-ons

Bread, Stone Circle Bakehouse, *Holt*

Meat Variety, Heffron Farms, *Belding*

Recipes and Tips!

Creamy Potato Soup

- Full share (1 lb) Veggie Box potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 2-3 Veggie Box onions, diced
- 1 medium Veggie Box carrot, diced
- 1 bunch last week's Veggie Box dill, chopped
- 2 tsp salt
- 4 cloves Veggie Box garlic, minced
- 4 cups vegetable or chicken stock
- 7 oz smoked cheddar cheese, or normal cheddar + 1/2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1/2 cup sour cream

Heat a glug of olive oil in a soup pot over medium heat. Sauté onion and carrot until soft. Add minced garlic and sauté until fragrant. Add the dill, salt and potatoes. Stir to combine. If using smoked paprika, add it at this stage.

Add vegetable stock and bring to a light simmer. Cook for 20- 30 minutes, until the potatoes are very soft and starting to break up. Use a potato masher to mash about half the soup. This adds creaminess, while retaining some texture.

Remove from the heat. Add smoked cheddar and sour cream, stir until melted through.

Topping Options! Garnishes can really fancy up a potato soup and let your creativity shine. Mix and match: Veggie Box microgreens, toasted bread-crumbs, minced garlic, chopped chives, Veggie Box bacon, sour cream (thin to drizzling consistency with lemon juice), chili crisps, shredded cheese, french fried onions, croutons, or even crumbled potato chips.

Adapted from: <https://www.happyveggiekitchen.com/vegetarian-potato-soup/>



Did You Know?

The saying “**One bad apple spoils the barrel**” comes from the need to monitor storage crops during winter months and quickly dispose of damaged, softening or rotten ones! Damaged apples exude ethylene, a gas that shortens the shelf life of all nearby produce.



Baked Apples

This week's apple is Ida Red, an excellent baking apple, holding their sturdy shape! They are well suited to a dessert because their tart profile pairs well with added sweetness.

- Veggie Box apples
- 2 tbsp butter, cold and cubed
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1/2 cup old-fashioned oats (not instant)
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup apple juice or apple cider

Preheat your oven to 350°F. Use a paring knife, cut a deep hole into the apples, removing the core; this is where the filling will go. Combine butter, brown sugar, oats, cinnamon and salt. Use your fingers to mix until the butter is incorporated but still crumbly. Fill each apple with about 1 tbsp of oat filling. Place the apples in a baking dish or cast-iron pan. Fill the bottom of the pan with the apple juice and cover with aluminum foil. Bake for 30 minutes and then uncover the foil. Bake for another 10-15 minutes or until the top is golden brown.

Tips: Microgreens

Best stored: In the fridge in an airtight container with high humidity. Lasts about a week. More likely to mold than wilt, check carefully if nearing a week of fridge storage.

Uses: Garnish pasta dishes, avocado toast, soups. Brings bright green flavor to salads and sandwiches. Blend into smoothies or pesto. Great as a component of a rice bowl.

