

Folk Forum Newsletter

January, 2004

The Oak Center General Store
January '04, #1

GREETINGS in the NEW YEAR from a 15 acre plot in the little village of Oak Center . You are receiving this newsletter because at some point you emailed me and requested that your name be included on the STORE/RECIPE e-list. If, for some reason, you don't want to receive this newsletter or you want to be on the folkforum e-list to receive the music and program schedule, please email back.

I sit down to compose this month's musings regarding store, farm, cook stove news and recipes, and the weather has turned frozen tundra-like. Just in the nick of time, because I was beginning to think another mild non-winter was in store for us. I took heed of the cold warnings, and finally mulched all of the bulbs I planted in mid-November (!)--can you believe it? Time to haul out the long underwear and wool socks, I guess. Glad we're all at home everyday, keeping the homefires burning, being with our kids, working together and best of all, no one is driving off to a job far away. Somehow we manage to make a living doing what we do. Hard work, though, but hey, we chose this so no complainin'!

Thanks for all the positive feedback, stories and comments after the STRIB story ran! We've have some nice visitors in the store, too. Continued feedback and stories are welcome--especially memories about the Oak Center Store from long ago and the dance hall upstairs.

STORE NEWS: With the onslaught of US mad cow scare, the phone has been ringing about our pasture-raised animal products. Just so you all know, we do carry very local bison, elk, Highlander beef, pork, lamb, chicken, duck, turkey and goose. I personally know all the farmers who raise the meat and they are all within 30 miles of the store. We raise the lamb, chicken, and other such poultry. All animals have been pasture-raised without hormone injections or antibiotics. They are finished on grass to increase their OMEGA 3 ingestion and thus, content (i.e. increased antioxidants and vitamins). The poultry is fed certified organic feed from Cashton , WI . Our hens are laying like crazy again now that there is more daylight. It never fails. Once that winter solstice happens, the gradual increase in egg production is apparent. They say hens need 17 hours of daylight for consistent laying, but my theory is more ethereal. Once we go thru the longest night (this year it was Dec.

22nd, my four year old, Hope's b-day), the light increases day by day, and the hens respond accordingly.

The skinny is this: we have A LOT of EGGS in the store right now and my recipes may reflect that because I tend to cook what is in abundance at any given moment.

Inventory is in full swing this week...lots of counting to be done.

FEATURED PRODUCTS: the handy, dandy, ever popular wooden **PLASTIC BAG DRYER**...for all of you who love washing your bags and re-using them again and again in the kitchen...the plastic bag dryer-with small wooden dowels coming out of a sturdy wooden base is a must have in the kitchen at \$15.00--not bad, huh? I will ship upon request....

Harvey Lambright's certified organic **SORGHUM**--at \$5 per pint. This excellent substitute for molasses in baking is a delicious sweetener. Some prefer it to molasses especially for ginger cookies! Sorghum is a grain that when harvested and boiled down turns into a dark, thick syrup with the consistency of molasses though not quite that thick and a special sweet flavor all its own. We love it on pancakes and French toast. Harvey hails from Lime Springs, IA, just over the border of MN, south of Harmony in an Amish community. He is also a member of the grower's cooperative we market our produce through in the metro area, Full Circle Organic Grower's Cooperative.

FARM NEWS: Steven has been frantically ordering seeds for the up and coming growing season and is getting ready to start herbs, flowers, onions and leeks in the dome greenhouse located in the middle of the barnyard. This is a reminder to me to get the CSA brochures printed up and mailed. An exciting time in the dead of winter--dreaming about what new crops to grow and then actually mixing huge piles of potting soil to start the early stuff. We have to keep lots of wood stoves going during this season, but it's worth it once those little seedlings start germinating and popping up in their greenness and...the cycle continues.

He has also planted in the off-the-grid 40' x 60' solar powered greenhouse, which houses a great second floor community space for classes and such. Asian veggies like bok choy, mustard greens, baby pac choy, as well as salad mix, broccoli, kale and collards for some mid-winter pick-me-up fresh produce are planted—the crops which are hardy enough to grow in a greenhouse in January. We'll keep you posted on availability on exactly what comes to harvest from that planting.

The animals seem cold. We put out extra hay and straw to keep them happy!

COOKSTOVE NEWS: We are going through A LOT of wood right now. All the stoves are going during the day including the outdoor wood burning furnace which must be stoked twice a day with huge 5 ft. logs. Joe is making a beautiful cedar chest and an

apple tree stump table in the woodshop for folks who placed orders so he has to keep a stove going. I keep the stove going behind the store to keep the room warm and to have hot water available if any customers or visitors want a cup of tea or coffee. The stove in our living space is always going to keep the little ones warm.

Wood is a constant theme here...we have the slivers to prove it, too! From Steven and Joe collecting the most beautiful pieces of wood to incorporate into their furniture projects, to the simple satisfaction we all get from chainsawing and splitting a load, wood is an integral part of our life.

I'm not a big user of the chainsaw actually. But I definitely do my share of splitting and hauling. Wood is a renewable resource here so we burn scraps from the sawmill in Preston. We try to minimize our fossil fuel use, and the fact that wood doesn't contribute a whole heck of a lot to global warming (it doesn't add CO₂ to the atmosphere) makes it a sensible energy source to us. We also have a wind charger that provides some of our electricity, but that is another story.

For me, woodstove cooking is an art form; I'm still trying to become accomplished at it. Even if I sometimes end up with black soot on my face after loading wood in the stove, and then walk around in the store helping customers, oblivious to the smudge or burn my bread in the oven - I wouldn't have it any other way.

RECIPES:

KALE CARROT FRITTADA (serves 4) (thanks, Dianne)

Kale, the queen of all dark, leafy greens is loaded with vitamins A, B, C, E, folic acid, calcium, and antioxidants is an essential ingredient in our household to maintain a healthy crew. I include it in many recipes throughout the week, put up many, many quart-sized freezer bags full (blanched) to get thru the winter. We grow Red Russian kale, white Russian kale, lacianto or dinosaur kale, red boar kale and green curly kale. We love it sautéed in olive oil with garlic served over pasta and rice. In my opinion, it is vital for good health and cancer prevention. My diatribe on kale is over now.

6 eggs

½ c. milk

1c. finely chopped kale

2-4 shredded carrots

2 cloves garlic, crushed

½ tsp. celtic salt

¼ tsp. black pepper

½ c. shredded cheddar cheese

Stir up eggs and milk and add salt and pepper. (We love celtic salt and sell it in the store because of its unprocessed grey color and fantastic flavor...pricey? Yes. But so good for you!) Pour in well-oiled cast iron skillet or casserole dish. Stir in kale, carrots and garlic. Top with shredded cheese. Bake in 350 degree oven for 15-20 minutes or

until eggs set and cheese is melted and slightly browned. Serve hot.

Wild Rice Chicken Stew

1 old stewing hen
1 medium onion
4 cloves garlic, crushed
1 green pepper, finely chopped
3 celery stalks, chopped
3 carrots, sliced
1 lb. potatoes, cubed
1 qt. stewed tomatoes
2 tsp. celtic salt
1 tsp. black pepper
1 tsp. basil
1 tsp. oregano
1 tsp. thyme
2 c. of cooked wild rice

Simmer stewing hen all day on low heat until tender. Save stock and pick chicken off bone and discard bones and skins. Add potatoes, salt and pepper. If you can't get an old hen, a free-ranging one will do. Sauté and lightly cook onion, garlic, green pepper, celery, carrots with remaining herbs. Add sautéed vegies and tomatoes to stew when potatoes are almost cooked. Simmer for 1 hour. Add rice. The brown basmati/wild rice blend available in most coops works well for this stew. Add more salt and pepper if needed.

Sorghum Popcorn Balls--for the kids (but sooooo good, you might want to skip the ball part and just eat it as sorghum corn)!

6c. popped popcorn
1 c. sugar
1/2 c. water
1/3 c. sorghum
1/2 tsp. salt
1 ½ tsps. Cider vinegar
1 tbsp. butter

Combine sugar, water, sorghum, salt, and vinegar in a heavy-bottomed pot. Bring to a boil, then cover and boil for 3 minutes. Remove cover and reduce heat to medium. Slowly cook to 280 degrees (just short of hard crack). Smear butter inside a bowl and put popcorn in it. Drizzle molten syrup over the popcorn and stir it through. When cool Madison, WI) enough to handle, shape popcorn into balls. (Chefs Melissa Ruble and Odessa Piper, L'Etoile Restaurant)

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and some Sundays