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Tell us about a crop or a vegetable that is particularly interesting to you.

Sweet Corn – Hana Newcomb

We don't grow sweet corn ourselves anymore, but I spent every summer of my life, from age 15 to about 35, picking corn. Our farm started out as a sweet corn farm, and we picked corn every morning because back in those days, there was no extended sugar gene. You had to eat the corn on the day it was picked. It took several hours of picking every morning, starting just before sunrise. We grew enough to sell it to wholesale customers – people who ran roadside stands in Arlington and McLean and Falls Church and who needed to have the corn packed and ready by 9 AM.

Over time, the soil got worn out. We were not growing corn organically, we were using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Eventually, when my father died of lymphoma that was probably related to the herbicides, we phased out sweet corn and started to concentrate on vegetables that we could grow organically. When we tried to grow corn without those chemicals, it was too hard and too weedy.

Now we have one farmer friend, Dave Paulk of Sassafras Creek



From left: Jon, Hana (nine months pregnant and still pickin'), Anna, Jim picking corn in 1989.

Farm, who persists in growing organic sweet corn. He starts the plants in the greenhouse, he transplants them into black plastic mulch, and he grows delicious corn. The stalks are about half as tall as our Silver Queen was, but the ears of corn are quite respectable in size, and absolutely delicious.

At the stand, we sell sweet corn that is grown conventionally (herbicides and pesticides) on the Eastern Shore or in Pennsylvania. It is also delicious and the sweetness lasts for days. We know what it takes to grow it, and we eat it with

appreciation.

I am glad that I had the chance to pick corn for all those years. We carried 50 pounds of corn in a tall wooden basket, on one shoulder, as we charged out of the field, heads tucked down so the sharp leaves wouldn't scrape our eyes. We were soaked through with dew. In those days, there were no fancy quick dry fabrics. We wore blue jeans and turtlenecks, and bandanas to protect our faces. Picking corn was definitely a young person's sport, and we certainly behaved like it was a competition. Those were the good old days.

Love and Dandelion Greens – Rachel Udall

“This is the worst thing I’ve ever eaten”, remarked PVF owner and lifelong vegetable purveyor, Hana Newcomb, upon trying a dressed dandelion leaf at last Friday’s potluck. Equally complimentary comments, such as “this is a weed!” and “why are you selling this?”, have frequently escaped customers’ mouths upon sighting our hearty bunches of dandelion greens at market (yes, the very same plant you would see in a lawn or concrete crack and exclaim, “this is a weed!”). When we pick these bunches in the fields, we, the farmers, entertain ourselves by ragging on the imagined customer of questionable (and frankly, freakish) tastes, who goes out of their way to source - and exchange real money for - such a bitter, astringent, and borderline inedible green. I, myself, had written off dandelion greens entirely after long ago trying a nibble while picking, and deciding it was, indeed, the worst thing I’ve ever eaten.

And then I fell in love. I learned quite early on in our dating that she was not only a fan of dandelion greens, but a living, breathing example of the fictional, caricatured customer I had spent many market mornings mocking. She not only went out of her way to procure bunches of dandelion greens (at the Dupont Circle farmers’ market, where we met), but bought them in pairs,

triplets, quartets... multiples I had thought too outlandish to exist on a real (sane) person’s grocery list. And I found myself – a devout dandelion doubter – producing drool and rumbling stomach noises as I listened to her describe cooking those piles of bitter greens with fats and cream and spices, herself possessed by a fiery and intoxicating culinary fervor.

Last year in the greenhouse we forgot to seed dandelions, or maybe we did and they were eaten by desperate/masochistic rodents. That loss carried the emotional and fiscal weight of a single grain of sand being



removed from the Gobi Desert – so inconsequential that I can’t even remember the specific cause of the “crop failure”. This spring, I carefully sowed Johnny’s “Italiko” dandelion green seeds, and saw a world in that grain of sand, and a heaven in a weedy flower. They sprouted around the time of our first kiss, and continued to reach for the sun as I found myself growing towards this new source of life-giving light and warmth I had found in Kate. A world which once grew bitter greens, now grows greens which are still bitter, but which dance beautifully in communion with the heavy cream and butter and wine and red pepper and meats and beans and pastas she cooks them with; whose bitterness is now not a flaw, but a distinctive and sensual pleasure. I - changed in a myriad of unforeseeable, wonderful ways - am now presently the subject of my past mockery, happily slurping up bowls of sauteed garlic and dandelions, and voluntarily enjoying tender young dandelion shoots tossed with lemon juice and olive oil at least once a week. They are not only edible, but coveted. I see dandelions through new, starry eyes; I proselytize their greatness to market customers; I force them upon captive coworkers at potluck; and I think how much richer and more delicious life is with dandelion greens on my plate, sharing them with the person who taught me to love them.

Happy blending!!!

Fennel – Aubrey Clendenin

I enjoy picking the fennel that is growing in the tunnel this year. To my five senses, the fennel is pleasant to all of them. It smells fresher and better than candy licorice. It gives life when you pick it. It looks pure white and green. It is peaceful in the place where fennel grows, improving the earth where it grows. It is a sturdy vegetable because the base is wider than the stem, so it creates a very stable garden bed. Inch by inch, it grows up from the dirt,

and creates something beautiful. It has a smooth base and stems with fluffy leaves. The fennel itself has a variety of textures to it. The shape seems made just perfectly for humans to make food from. It has a bit of an hourglass shape to the base. Remarkably, it grows 1-2 feet higher after that. The top of the plant is beautiful, sort of like textured frilly leaves. It is a wonderful vegetable. It tastes uplifting, sweet yet grounding, and pairs well with other foods people know and love. I enjoy fennel fried at breakfast with scrambled eggs or local chicken sausage.

Romanesco Cauliflower – Meredith Graves

Many years ago, I was fortunate to tag along with my friend and her aunt on a trip to Thailand where I snorkeled for the first time. It was a mind-blowing experience. We didn't try too hard to find the good spots or book a trip. We just waded into the water with some masks and BAM - - I experienced a whole wonderful world I had only seen on shows or in books. The corals looked like huge brains; the sea fans looked like colorful mini trees. There were all kinds of different fish and other creatures doing their thing – all looking different and unique just like us humans. Everything had such a symmetrical, repeating pattern, and it was so quiet. When I'm working in the PVF fields, it's like reverse snorkeling - all these cool things are growing around me and, even though traffic is nearby, it's so quiet. The fields of growing chard, or collards, or kale look like those sea fans. Their tough stems grow out of the ground and grow ribs that reach throughout the leaf with perfect symmetry on the left and right sides. They remind me of tree trunks and branches or a spinal cord and nerves. The fennel bulbs with their gorgeous, dainty fronds look like human hearts with the arteries and ventricles. But the vegetable which blew my mind is one I saw for the first time was 2 years ago on the farm when I packed a Romanesco cauliflower. Seriously? It is the most magical looking vegetable. Not only is it a crazy almost fluorescent green color, but it looks like something out of a fairy tale - - it looks like a coral, a seashell, and a vegetable all at the same time. I think there is a name for these repeating patterns – a fractile? A Fibonacci pattern? The Tree of Life? All I know is we grow yummy and gorgeous vegetables that are magical!

Blueberries – Sam Trentham

When I think of early summer, I think of blueberries. I think of my grandma's pies and picking by the bucket and the sensational perfect berry, warm from the sun. Blueberries are for making a complete mess of your hands and mouth and shirt. They are for hungry children who grab them by the fistful and for dogs sometimes as a treat. It's a sad moment, this year without blueberries, but it's not forever. We will have a spring without the late frost, and the bushes will bloom and turn to fruit, and we'll feel lousy with delight that our old friends have come home.



Garlic – Aubrey Clendenin

Garlic has many benefits to the health of your body. It is one of the most medicinal and healthy substances in the world. It goes back in history to days long, long ago and was used to prevent and combat the common cold. It is enjoyed across multicultural culinary traditions. It is medicinal due to its sulfur compounds that help your body, it boosts immune system function, lowers blood pressure, lowers cholesterol, reduces dementia risk, extends your life, improves athletic performance, detoxes your body, and increases the health of your bones. It has vitamins and minerals. These include manganese, vitamin B6, vitamin C, and selenium.

The actual stem and garlic bulb are beautiful. If I was a farm plant, I would choose to be a garlic plant! It is mysterious how the garlic bulb and stem grow so intricately below the dirt and up into space. The design of the bulb and stem are so perfect. The stem is slightly hollow which allows people to harvest the scapes on the top of the plant for food. I found the work on the farm picking garlic scapes to be delightful! The scapes snap out of the top of the garlic plant with ease, which is amazing. One would think that a plant wouldn't be so generous. All the farm crew diligently picked garlic scapes for several days. The scapes really do improve a meal, particularly the taste and the olfactory system picks up on the strength of the vegetable, as well.

To me, garlic is an example of God's miraculous world.

