

The Frost

By John

This is one of those scary times in vegetable farming that you know is impending all season. The inevitability of the first frost is here. You never know whether it will be an early frost or a late frost or whether it will be light or heavy. What we do know is that it will most definitely have an impact on the rest of the season, some good and some bad. We have been counting on a light frost especially looking at the weather ahead. After Wednesday night we know that we are heading back into a nice warming trend with very mild weather. I was up at the neighbors to pick up some mild steel for a project and the weather came up. A farmer for most of his life right here in Farmington he assured me that the full moon in September is the coldest stretch in the month. If we can get through this without a killing frost then we should be safe for close to another month. On matters such as these I tend to give credence to the wisdom of an old farmer. When someone has more years farming than I have had life, I think it reasonable to assume they know a thing or two about what kind of weather to expect. The question then becomes, will it be a light frost or the killing kind? A few days ago I would have been certain it was going to be light. But then the forecast began its precipitous decline. On Sunday the Wednesday overnight low was to be about 36° then it began dropping every ten to twelve hours from there one degree at a time; 35° then 34°. At 34° the frost seems a bit more inevitable but probably light. Then comes 33°, we figure some things will need to be covered up mostly worried about the tomatoes. At 32° we know frost is inevitable, goodbye basil. When the forecast says 31° we realize the peppers and eggplant could be kaput. As of right now we are expecting an overnight low of 30°. Not a hard frost by any stretch of the imagination. A rude but likely awakening Thursday morning can be expected. It is hard to know exactly what to expect, the wind speed should die down which is unfortunate as air circulation helps keep the frost from settling. It is only a forecast after all and it might not get that cold out at all, or perhaps it will be colder. At these temperatures we aren't too worried about most crops. Though we aren't quite ready to give up on the tomatoes, peppers

WHATS ON DECK

We will have potatoes, onions, garlic, winter squash and salad. Probably turnips, radishes, beets and carrots will all be here. Hopefully from now until the end you will get a different type of squash and potato each week. If the weather holds out there should be plenty more peppers, eggplant and tomatoes to come. Our broccoli and cauliflower is a little slow but we hope to have that coming very soon.

and eggplant. Especially as all three of them have a fresh fruit set and flowers on them. Keeping them going for a few more weeks would be really great as we could keep getting some really nice fruit. Our first defense is to cover the plants with row cover to keep the frost off of them. We had been trying but it was a bit futile as we had swirling winds this afternoon, which kept pulling the cover off as fast as we could tack it down. This is especially problematic with the tomatoes, mostly since they are all staked and trellised with t-posts and rebar which just love to shred up row covers. Late Wednesday night as the winds calm I imagine you would be able to find me out in the field getting the covers on. With a little protection the few sensitive crops should pull through just fine. While we are hoping to put off the frost for just a little while longer, we always look forward to the fall. We really love everything about the fall. The cool nights, the crisp daytime air, the changing colors. There is a distinct smell that a cool fall morning part of me looks forward to all summer. 40°-50° is the perfect temperature for vigorous outdoor work; cleaning brush and splitting wood are two of my personal favorite fall workouts. The pace begins to slow as the days grow shorter and we can see respite on the horizon. We can reflect on the year and begin to think in earnest about the next. People often ask why we wouldn't go to Brazil or California where we could farm and make money all year. To which we reply 'never'. We love the changing seasons, we need them. Like the soil we farm and the wilds around it, it needs time to rest, to slow down and time to gather its strength to flourish once more. Tomatoes are great, but not for 30, 40 or 50 weeks and who would ever want a squash in a land of eternal summer. We don't grow broccoli, kale, cauliflower or cabbage in the summer because we believe it needs the cold.

Sure it grows OK in the heat but what it really needs is some nice cold nights. It's the cold that forces it to produce sugars, as antifreeze to protect itself from the cold, which is what makes it so sweet and delicious. Without the cold we would miss out on the best that many crops have to offer. I can't imagine a world without the fall bounty anymore than I can imagine Halloween without orange, red and brown leaves or Christmas without snow.



Row covers put on at 2 AM, let's hope it worked



Some potatoes dug up with John's latest creation

News and Notes

- All the winter squash and onions are out of the field and cured or curing. We still need to get the rest of the potatoes out of the ground and into storage. After that we will have a close eye on the beets carrots and parsnips expecting them to be ready for harvest by the end of the month.
- We will keep you posted, but be expecting us to ask you to participate in the members survey in the next few weeks. These surveys provide crucial feedback to help us better manage the farm and make the CSA better for everyone

Featured Item

Ever-bearing Strawberries! We had been hoping to get you a springtime surprise and we finally have it just in time for fall. Gardens of Eagan have a hoophouse full of these plants that have finally begun to produce again and we were lucky enough to get our hands on some of them for you. I don't know of any CSA's that have strawberries in the fall so enjoy! If you want to keep them for the winter, slice them in half and lay them out on a cookie sheet. You can sprinkle some sugar on them or not. Place the sheet in your freezer overnight and in the morning transfer them to a freezer bag and keep frozen.

Recipe of the Week

Creamy Squash Soup

- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoon butter
- 3 cans chicken or vegetable stock
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 cup diced onion
- 1 medium squash (about 2 pounds), Halved, peeled and seeded; cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1/3-1/2 cup light cream, you can use heavy if desired

Place squash in saucepan along with carrots, onions, and broth then add in the salt. Simmer 40 minutes uncovered. Puree soup in a blender or food processor along with 2 tablespoons butter. If using a blender use the pulse button and leave a little opening in the lid to let the hot air escape. Add the cream.

This is just a basic recipe, experiment with other herbs and spices. I like to use (at about a dash at a time) any or all of the following; brown sugar, cinnamon, curry, ginger, turmeric, ground cardamom, paprika and cayenne pepper. Also when using thin-skinned varieties like delicata or kabocha, I usually leave the skins on, as they are both edible and tasty.