



Tucson Community Supported Agriculture

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Summer 2013

Harvest list is online

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Quelites (Amaranth Greens)

When our southern Arizona summer blasts its hot air through fields and gardens, the only greens that naturally grow around us are quelites and purslane, and both make occasional appearances in our CSA shares. While many tend to consider quelites as weeds, we often overlook their good flavor and exceptional nutritional qualities.

Quelites are grown as cultivated crops as well as harvested wild. The Mexican term quelites generally refers to either amaranth greens (pigweed), or to lamb's quarters (goosefoot or chenopodium), although in Mexico many other wild greens are collectively known as quelites.

Essentially, quelites can be cooked like spinach, hence their other appellation of wild spinach.

They are a very good source of vitamins including beta-carotene, vitamin B6, vitamin C, riboflavin, and folate, and dietary minerals including calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, copper, and manganese. However their moderately high content of oxalic acid inhibits the absorption of calcium and zinc, and also means that they should be avoided or eaten in moderation by people with kidney disorders, gout, or rheumatoid arthritis.

HOW THE TUCSON CSA CHANGED OUR LIVES, by Shawn and Susan Halversen

We all make choices. And, we all have reasons for those choices. For us, one of the best choices we've ever made was becoming part of the Tucson CSA. Now, we know that if you're reading this, you most likely made the same choice, but possibly for different reasons.

For many years, we were disappointed in the selection and quality of grocery store produce. It was usually limited to a few types of vegetables, often under-ripe, bruised, wilted, or otherwise flawed. But, most importantly, it wasn't very good. And isn't that the whole point of food, to taste good? If it weren't, we'd all be eating Purina Human Biscuits and be happy. Then, five or six years ago, we read The Omnivore's Dilemma, by Michael Pollan. In the back, we found a reference to localharvest.org. Checking the site, we learned of the Tucson CSA; we stopped in, saw the produce, talked with Philippe, signed up, and have been members ever since.

The quality of the CSA produce was so much better than that in the store, which translated directly and immediately into better tasting meals, but, we found that we had to turn the way we cook upside down. Instead of starting with a recipe and buying the necessary ingredients, we had to look at our share and ask, "what can we make from this?" To be honest, at first it was a real challenge, and it still can be – especially during greens season – but we had a few successes which made us want to cook and bake more, and, with practice, our CSA-based meals became even better. Independently, we had found one of the secrets of the most renowned chefs: start with the highest-quality ingredients you can; this became one of our keystones with regards to cooking.

But, we also learned more when we visited the farm for open houses; that is, to be thankful and thoughtful about our food. Standing out in Farmer Frank's fields in Phoenix in early July, with the sun beating down on us, we gained a real appreciation for the amount of effort and discomfort that Frank and his employees go through to bring us our produce. It simply humbled us. We've had that same experience when we visited Josh and his chickens that supply our eggs, when we've visited David and Kathryn at Black Mesa Ranch who supply our goat cheese, when we've talked with Don of Barrio Bread, and the people working at the CSA itself. All these people are working so hard to provide the best product that they can to feed *us*. That means that we have the responsibility to treat our food – their hard work – with respect. Our end of the bargain was no longer simply paying for our shares; to hold up our end of the bargain became to try to use everything in our shares, even those radish greens, and to take the time and effort to make the best dishes we possibly could. To do otherwise was to waste their efforts. We had learned a second secret of great chefs: when cooking, focus all your attention and efforts toward what you are making.

For us, these two ideas evolved our cooking to the point where we now make almost everything at home, from the simplest ingredients possible. The Tucson CSA has started us on a grand adventure of cooking, making, and baking everything we possibly can, from granola to crackers to pickles to buttermilk to bread. And, for that, to everyone who helped set us on this path, we sincerely say thank you.

You can follow Shawn and Susan's blog at <http://scratchinit.halversen.com>

Garlicky Sauté of Amaranth Greens and Tomatoes (ensalada de bleado blanco)

Serve with grilled meat or with a toss of rice, beans, and corn for a meatless meal. The cumin, allspice, and sesame all subtly underscore the amaranth, so don't omit them.

1 bunch amaranth greens
1-2 tomatoes, seeded and diced if large
6 medium scallions (green onions), thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, minced
4 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
¼ teaspoon ground allspice
½ teaspoon ground cumin
1 to 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds

1. In a very large skillet, heat 3 tablespoons oil over fairly low heat. Add garlic and stir until light golden. Add scallions, tomatoes, salt, pepper, allspice, and cumin. Raise heat to moderately high and sauté until tomatoes are juice and tender but not soft, about 2 minutes.

2. Add amaranth leaves. With tongs, turn to mix evenly with tomato mixture. Stir and twist leaves constantly until they barely wilt, a minute or two. Turn off heat. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil and 1 teaspoon vinegar. Taste and add more vinegar and pepper if needed. Scoop into dish. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve hot.

Wilted Amaranth Greens (Quelites)

Amaranth makes such flavorful greens that a favorite approach is to cook it quickly, although its robust flavor and texture stand up to long cooking as well. You can proceed along two lines. Sizzle a few slivers of garlic in olive oil, follow with a healthy pinch of salt, and then add the greens. Cover for a minute to let the greens wilt down, then keep tossing until the leaves and stems are tender and no longer taste raw.

A second, pan-Asian treatment is to use peanut or corn oil, into which you toss finely sliced or shredded ginger, either alone or with a few slivers of garlic; a dry red chili or two; and then the salt and greens, proceeding as before.

Melon and Serrano Ham

Sara Jones, Tucson CSA

Serrano ham and melon is a classic Spanish combination. The salty richness of the ham is a great contrast for the cool, sweet melon. Use whatever salty cured pork you can find easily. Or use a firm, salty cheese, like manchego, in place of the ham. This dish could be as simple as chunks of melon served alongside or wrapped with thin slivers of ham or cheese. Make it fancier by pureeing the melon with olive oil and sherry vinegar to make a gazpacho, then garnish each bowl with strips of ham or cheese and a chiffonade of basil.

1 small, or 1/2 large melon, cut into pieces
2 teaspoons sherry vinegar
2 teaspoons olive oil
3-4 long slices of ham or cheese, cut into pieces
Sprinkling of salt

Toss melon with oil and vinegar and sprinkle lightly with salt. Serve on a plate beside the ham or cheese.

Melon Sorbet

Philippe Waterinckx, Tucson CSA

1 melon (cantaloupe or honeydew), peeled, seeded and cubed
3 tablespoons lemon or lime juice
2 tablespoons vodka
1/4 cup sugar

Place all ingredients in a food processor and process until smooth. Refrigerate until chilled. Pour the chilled mixture into an ice cream maker and process according to manufacturer's directions. Alternately, pour mixture into a baking dish and place in freezer, stirring gently every 40 minutes or so, until frozen. Transfer sorbet to an airtight container and freeze three to four hours before serving.

Panzanella

Sara Jones, Tucson CSA

You can use a variety of summer vegetables in this dish.

2 to 3 mixed red and green tomatoes, cut into wedges
2 tomatillos, cut into wedges
About 1 cup diced melon
1 large or 2-3 small onions, diced
2 to 3 cloves garlic, minced
3 slices stale bread, cut into cubes
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon thyme
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon vinegar or lemon juice
Salt and pepper to taste

Mix vegetables together, drizzle with the vinegar, one tablespoon of the oil and a pinch of salt and pepper. Heat the remaining one tablespoon of oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add bread cubes to skillet and stir to coat with oil. Sprinkle bread with herbs and spices, and cook, stirring occasionally until crispy and beginning to brown. Add hot bread directly to vegetables and toss to combine. Serve at room temperature.



Tomatillos: make sure to remove the husks before using.