

Report from the Field

Our dream for the farm is to grow/raise the greatest diversity we can, providing our community and family with a bounty of healthy food. Each year we try to add to the diversity, and this spring is no exception. We added 30 apple trees, 17 peaches, and a modest 140 blueberry bushes to our fruit collection. Asian and European pears were planted last year (they are doing well), and we planted 52 dwarf apple trees in 2012. With a little luck, we should see a reasonable harvest from the dwarf apple trees this year. For the rest of the fruits it will unfortunately be a number of years before we will see substantial harvests, which is why there is a saying, “the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago, the second best time is today”.

{ photos are of our recently planted peach trees and a bud on our apple trees }

In addition to enjoying the bounty of this diversity, the diversity turns the farm into a mutually symbiotic collection of plants and animals. The cows will fertilize the soil, the healthy soil will nourish the trees, the trees will provide homes for the birds, the birds will eat insects in the garden, the garden will help feed the cows, the cows will help feed the chickens (whey), the chickens will eat the fly larvae in the cow poop, ... and the cows will be content. Our hand in this is to see what we are missing and then add it so that we can approach a self-sustaining ecosystem.

Of course the fun of farming is that it will always be a gambler’s game; Mother Nature shall do as she pleases and that self-sustaining system of bounty we strive for will have its highs and lows. We currently have 500 plants that don’t like the cold and this is the coolest spring we’ve seen in the past five years (although it is still warmer than what our grandparents experienced 50 years ago). About half of those plants, the tomatoes, are “itchin” to go in the ground in our greenhouse, but not at the current nighttime temperatures. We are transporting 21 large trays from the greenhouse to the basement each day to keep them warm at night. Having tomatoes ready to go in the ground May 1st has paid off in the past: we normally have some of the earliest tomatoes amongst our farming friends, but we play the spring gamble to do so (don’t worry, we will have tomatoes).

As you may remember from last month, the peas were just beginning to poke out of the ground, basking in their first taste of the sun. Here are the peas today, starting their way up the trellis system. With a little luck we should be enjoying peas in mid-June.



Although it may be a bit cooler than previous years, we still have plenty growing. Here are beets and carrots that were planted in February in our greenhouse. These should be ready around the time the CSA begins. There are numerous other crops in the ground as well: cabbage, broccoli, spinach, lettuces, radishes, arugula, kale, chard, etc.



No field report would be complete without photos of a cow. We are getting ready for our lovely Opal Annie to give birth sometime in the next few weeks (we think). Her body has been changing: her udder is enlarging, teats are extending, belly is getting huge. We have slowly gotten her used to being touched and being in the stanchion for milking. It seems like we have everything ready, but what we have been told about hand-milking your first cow is to expect it to be so difficult and frustrating for a while that it will make you cry. We'll see about that...!

