

Report from the Field

If you eavesdrop on farmers' conversations you are likely to hear discussions about four topics: the weather, pests (insects and the larger four-legged varieties), weeds, and plant diseases. These are the matters that make us toss and turn at night. They can send the financials for the year into the red before you know what happened. Diversifying into many crops, like we do, means that no one pest or disease will wipe us out for the year, but it also means that we are sure to have a number of crops with challenges at any one time.

This spring is like all others in that regard. Many crops are looking beautiful. My personal favorite, likely to be harvested the 2nd week of the CSA, are the sugar snap peas. In order to get them early and to ensure good yields, two rows were planted in the greenhouse. We also have peas growing outside. I can't wait! The other wonderful item of note about peas: you don't have to be bent over to pick them, a welcome change of posture for a farmer.



Kale is definitely a family favorite. The kale salad recipe in our recipe book is thoroughly enjoyed by the whole family, so much so that we ate it about 5 days a week, for months, one year. The kale thus far looks very good. Transplanted recently, it is growing well and has escaped pest pressure thus far. We cover it with a fine mesh row cover, which protects it from flea beetles and a number of caterpillars. At this point, flea beetles are the major concern. If they make their way inside, they can devastate the kale crop. If we can keep them off, we could have a beautiful kale harvest from this one planting for the entire season. We do have a later planting planned, just in case. We hope to be harvesting kale by the 2nd or 3rd week of the CSA.



One of the significant challenges at this point is spinach, chard, and beets (the chenopodia family). An insect, called leafminer, eats the inside of the leaf while in the larval stage. The photo shows the damage this insect can do to a spinach leaf (the chard is looking similar). Our controls for this crop are rotation (we planted beets at our other property in Willington) and row covers. The row covers, in theory, keep the adult fly off the leaves, preventing them from laying eggs on the underside of the leaves. Our early plantings of spinach have been significantly damaged, but some of our later plantings are covered well and will hopefully escape the damage caused by this pest.



The strawberry plants are looking like they will be right on time for the beginning of the CSA, 2nd week at the latest. We had a few nights in the past month when they were in full bloom and frost threatened, which made us scurry around covering them, but now hopefully all threat of frost is behind us. We are expecting a nice berry harvest.



Small, four-legged, pests have been causing some havoc with our squash blocks. We start squash in blocks to be transplanted, and we were finding empty seed pods lying around the trays. Mouse traps, with peanut butter, have alleviated the problem. We have also cut back on the cats' food ration to encourage some more hunting.



Having three (out of 4) cats that don't want to be disturbed all day from their slumber is no way to reduce the rodent population. Our appropriately named cat, Cookie, believes in a more pacifist role, bird-watching, and having meals delivered.

Carrots were started back in February, and with plenty of tender care, are coming along nicely. They should start being ready in the first few weeks of the CSA.



Cow Happenings

The cows are enjoying the lush green grass of spring. It is likely their favorite time of year; the grass is so much tastier than the hay they've eaten all winter, and the bugs are not driving them mad yet.

Two of the ladies are pregnant. Our black cow, Jasmine, will be giving birth in mid-June and Opal, the big brown cow, is due in mid-July. Sena and Aiyana are looking forward to Jasmine giving birth, not just to see the calf, but because Raluca said that homeschooling ends when the birth happens. Our workload will then increase, due to the daily milking, and the return to making cheese.



FYI, our cows are VERY protective of their calves for the first month or two. Do not go anywhere near them without one of us being with you.