

Johnson's Backyard Garden, July 15th

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We'd like your input for the newsletter! Please send related news articles, book reviews, recipes, etc to carolyn@johnsonsbaygard.com

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1) In Your Box this Week

Early Girl Tomatoes

Zucchini

Patty Pan Squash

Zephyr or Yellow Straight Neck Squash

Pickling and Slicing Cucumbers

Sweet Peppers

Hot Peppers

Eggplant

Basil

Onions

Melon

Look for okra and cherry tomatoes in the Trade Box

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As the unexpected never fails to happen, keep in mind that this list is subject to change depending on availability and quality of crops on harvest day. You'll find the most accurate packing list on the homepage of our [website](#). This list also features links to recipes, photos for the more unusual veggies, and other interesting tidbits.

2) Farm News

- We are breaking ground today on our back 7.5 acres! Lacking a red ribbon and oversized pair of scissors, we marked the occasion by resting for a moment from the okra harvest as Will drove the first pass with the chisel plow. Next week we will be extending our irrigation piping into this new field and incorporating soil amendments to build fertility. This field will be our main field as we continue with fall plantings, with the

front section of the field going into cover crops after the current crops are through.

- In Texas, the late summer planting is pretty much a mirror image of spring planting – so lately we’ve been setting out more tomatoes, eggplants, peppers. For the fall we’ll have 10 different tomato varieties, seven eggplant varieties, eight sweet pepper varieties and six hot pepper varieties. For the home gardeners out there, checkout the ‘More Info’ section of our website for [tips on gardening in Central Texas](#).
- On Saturday we had 16 workshares come help out with harvest – definitely our record so far! It was lots of fun, and we got the *whole* farm harvested!



- Due to the volume of our recent produce donations, we have worked out an agreement with Salvation Army to pick up donations from our farm and distribute it to four food banks around town.



- We have another new intern! Chris Paddock arrived from Rhode Island last Wednesday - see his intro below.

- Aaron, our webmaster extraordinaire, is visiting, working hard on all our IT questions, eating lots of good farm food and playing with the Johnson kids, his nieces and nephews.
- We're still looking for a CPA, contact us if you're interested.
- We've been lucky so far with pests, but this week the spider mites have gained the upper hand on the tomatoes and eggplants as the heat and dryness has weakened some of the plants. To combat this, we're working hard to keep the plants as healthily as possible, enabling them to use their natural defenses against pests such as spider mites.

3) Upcoming CSA Changes

We are currently working out a system to cap CSA membership. Renewing memberships will be guaranteed, however new members may have to be added to our waiting list.

Our CSA offers the flexibility of short-term subscriptions, however the CSA relationship works best for both the farm and the consumer with long-term memberships. For us, long-term membership guarantees us continued support, and for you it allows you to take full advantage of the bounty of the harvest. At some times of year the boxes are slimmer than at others, but much like with financial investing if you stick with us we will more than make up for it during weeks when the harvest is fuller. We are coming up on one of those 'slimmer' times very soon – peak summer harvest is just about over. We will continue to have lots of peppers, okra, basil, eggplants, and summer squash, however tomatoes will drop off for a few weeks until fall harvest begins.

Remember, we will be taking a one-week break from the CSA in August, the 14th to 21st. CSA boxes will resume the following Saturday, August 23rd.

4) Fun Times with Urban Roots

From Mike Evans, Co-program coordinator of Urban Roots

[Urban Roots](#), a youth development program of YouthLaunch, brings teenagers from across Austin to serve their community by growing food for residents of Austin and those in need. Sixteen 14-17 year olds work a one-acre diverse vegetable farm just across Boggy Creek at Hands of the Earth Farm (formerly Oasis) and learn about sustainable agriculture, hard work, leadership, and public speaking while learning a lot about themselves and those they work with. Since community service is central to the mission of Urban Roots (and because the plants are petering out on their one-acre) the Urban Roots interns have been taking work field trips to other farms. On Thursday the 10th, 2/3 of our crew went out to work with Brenton, Sarah, and the rest of the crew at Johnson's Backyard Garden. Split into three groups, our "farm interns" harvested squash and cucumbers, cut and folded 150 tomato cages, and helped out clearing the back 7.5 acres which will be farmed next year. Araesheon Foley, 14 years old and a rising sophomore at Reagan High School, loved clearing the big branches at the back of the property with her all-female crew. We learned to (almost) deftly avoid the sting of the bull-nettle and appreciated the machinery that helps the JBG crew get all their work done. As Anthony Gilbert, 16 from Johnston High School said, "They get a lot done with few people." We wish our neighbor farm the best and look forward to returning.



5) Chris, an Introduction

Hi! My name is Chris Paddock and I'm from the lovely little state of Rhode Island, where I had lived for my entire life. If you're curious, you could fit roughly two hundred and twenty Rhode Islands into Texas, I did the math. I'm a musician and an artist and beside for a brief stint as an apple orchard worker and the occasional trip to my friend Katie's farm in RI, I have little experience with the life of a farmer. Having spent the last five years in college, I decided that perhaps a change was due in my life. Several years ago I visited Austin, and formed an infatuation with the city, so Johnson's Backyard Garden appealed to the deepest regions of my little heart. And here I am.

My impressions of the farm so far are as follows: I must get over my long running fear of bees and wasps, as they are plentiful in my new environment. I know that the old "leave them alone and they'll leave you alone." &#xu201D; Saying must be true, but I'm worried about accidentally bothering them, like bumping into some tough guy who's looking for a fight at a club or something. We'll see how it goes.

I think my favorite part of the farm work so far has been all the little critters that are about. I have seen a tiny bunny that would've fit into my hand, several lizards, and there are these crazy beetles that are metallic green and pink. Yesterday, Will and I spotted some falcons, or at least that is what I assumed they were. Having lived my life in a city, I think perhaps the most interesting and rare animal that I had spotted is a raccoon.

I think that the farm life is the one for Me, for now at least. As the sun rises while out in the field and I'm already good and dirty I feel sure of it. It's awful pretty out here all day and boy, are those fresh vegetables good! My favorite so far, though you will certainly point out that these are not vegetables, is the melons. I called my dad just to tell him about them! Being outside all day is great, and there's nothing like hard work to make the body and mind feel like they are doing the right thing. I will enjoy the heat, the dirt and the quiet mindfulness of the life I am currently living in the coming months.

6) Tomatoes

Elaine DiRico

There is a wonderful article on CSA's in the July/August issue of Spirituality and Health Magazine. As those of us who are members of a CSA have found, food straight from the farm, the farmers and often, from the vine, is good for our health as well as our spirit. The lead for the article is ugly tomatoes:

"The food I get from the cooperative farm I belong to often looks sallow, splotchy and ill-formed. That's what I love about it! My produce is renegade! It is so lusciously, succulently, and nutritiously ugly. Americans, by and large, select their food on the unwieldy, abstract notion of physical beauty. It's as if we are scooping the produce for a one night stand."

I was a "Foodie" for several years at Central Market, and have watched that process. I have also seen people choose produce with pendulums, and my personal method, by sniffing. And there is certainly no fragrance more transporting than that of a tomato, and even more, a tomato vine.

Tomatoes are the most commonly grown garden 'vegetable.' (The quotation marks, because a tomato is botanically a fruit, but in 1893, our own Supreme Court ruled it a vegetable rather than a fruit, because a tariff was in place for vegetables from outside of the country, but not for fruit.) I am sure most of us had at least a plant or two growing in a pot or staked up with a few wires to the south side of the house when we were growing up, and that often, a kid's first chore was to get the tomatoes for dinner. My grandmother served them sprinkled with sugar, not salt, and fried the green ones. One of my earliest memories was helping her get the green tomatoes picked and into the root cellar before the first frost. She would bring them up, a half dozen at a time, to ripen on the window sill, and before they started to spoil she would put them up in green tomato piccalilli, a Southern Lady's answer to salsa.

Tomatoes are an integral element in my memories. My first trip to Europe, and especially Italy, with its open markets, were amazing in the varieties and uses of tomatoes. Since tomatoes arrived in Europe in the early sixteenth century, they have morphed into tomatoes for paste, for sauce and a myriad of other specialized fruit. The salad tomatoes there are also preferred much greener and more acidic than our version. Just a few years ago, the FDA began suggesting that home canners begin adding citric acid to their tomatoes, as we had developed less and less acidic varieties. A few drops of high fructose corn syrup has done as much to sabotage our palates as our waste-lines. (Typo intended.)

Mexico has an even more splendid array of tomatoes, especially the beautifully lobed and 'ruffled' varieties. A meal in the Mercado in Oaxaca a few years back was highlighted by one of these beauties, a bit of salt, avocado and lime juice. I am sure there was more to the menu, but I don't remember it.

My all time favorite tomato recipe is also one of the simplest, a uniquely Texan riff on the classic Italian salad:

Hill Country Caprese

To serve two people:

Slice enough **tomatoes** to cover the outer rim of two small salad plates (7", about 3-4 medium tomatoes) using as many types of tomatoes as possible. Slice 2-3 **peaches** and place them in the center of the plate. Add **bocconcini**, small balls of fresh **mozzarella**, or slices from a larger piece. Roll several fresh **basil leaves** into a 'cigar' and slice with a sharp knife into fine shreds, sprinkling over the salad. Finish with a couple of grinds of **coarse pepper**, a pinch of **coarse salt**, some good **extra virgin olive oil** and a tiny drizzle of **balsamic vinegar**. Serve with bread for mopping.

Texas Hills Vineyard makes a nice Pinot Grigio that goes well with this salad as a first course or light lunch.

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Elaine DiRico is a food critic and long-time CSA member. Feel free to contact her with questions, comments and recipe requests at ELAINE@dirico.com

7) Vegetable Storage Tips

We aim to grow and package our vegetables to maintain the highest taste and nutritional quality possible. However, once they've left the farm it's up to you to keep them fresh and nutritious. There's no refrigeration at the CSA drop points so it's good to pick up your box as early as possible. Here are some additional tips on how to store this week's share:

Fridge

- **Peppers** and **Cucumbers** should be stored in the crisper, and washed in cold water before use.
- **Zucchini** and other **Summer Squash** will last 4-7 days in plastic bags in the crisper.
- **Okra** will keep for only two or three days. Refrigerate unwashed, dry okra pods in the vegetable crisper, loosely wrapped in perforated plastic bags. Wet pods will quickly mold and become slimy. When the ridges and tips of the pod start to turn dark, use it or lose it. Once it starts to darken, okra will quickly deteriorate.

Counter

- **Basil** can be stored upright in a jar of water at room temperature, or in an open bag on the counter.
- **Eggplant** and **Garlic** are best kept moderately cool, no lower than 50 degrees. A cool, dry dark place is best- on the counter, in a cupboard or basket. Eggplant are delicate and do not store well, so try to use them within a few days.
- **Tomatoes** should be kept at room temperature, but can be refrigerated if very ripe. Leaving them in the paper bag will help them ripen quickly. Also, be sure to store your tomatoes away from your eggplants, or other sensitive produce such as bananas, as the tomatoes will make them ripen faster.
- **Melons** should be stored uncut in a cool dark place. Keep cut melons in the refrigerator.

Checkout our [storage tips](#) on our website for a more complete guide, and of course feel free to contact us with any questions.

8) Recipes

Eggplant Rollantini

From Giada De Laurentiis book Everyday Italian, shared with us by Sonii Nagel, Dale Texas

This is lighter than the classic eggplant parmesan, and slightly easier. It still combines eggplant w/ cheese and marinara sauce. She says you can also make this dish with zucchini. I chose to do it with both and add some yellow squash too and turn it into a grilled veggie bake.

4 medium eggplants (about 4 lbs), cut lengthwise into ½" thick slices
1 T plus 1 tsp sea salt
½ C Extra Virgin Olive Oil, plus more for drizzling
3 T pine nuts
32 oz whole milk ricotta cheese
2 large eggs, beaten to blend
½ C shredded mozzarella cheese
3 T freshly grated parmesan cheese
20 basil leaves, very thinly sliced
2 C marinara sauce (recipe following)
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper

Arrange the eggplant slices over a large baking sheet and sprinkle with 1 T salt (this helps extract the moisture from the eggplant) Set aside for 15 minutes. Rinse eggplant to remove the salt and pat dry.

Prepare a grill for medium heat, or preheat a ridged grill pan over a medium flame. Brush the eggplant slices with ½ C of oil and grill until lightly browned and tender, about 4 minutes per side.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Place the pinenuts on a heavy baking sheet and toast in the oven, stirring once, until the nuts are fragrant and light golden brown, about 5 minutes. Let cool. Maintain oven temperature.

Lightly oil a 13x9x2 inch baking dish. In a large bowl, mix the ricotta and eggs to blend. Gently stir in mozzarella, parmesan and pine nuts. Fold in the basil just to combine. Don't over mix. Place 1 T. of the cheese mixture at one short end of each eggplant slice and roll up tightly. Place the rollatini seam side down in the baking dish. (The eggplant rollatini can be prepared up to this point 8 hours ahead. Cover and refrigerate. Spoon the marinara sauce evenly over the eggplant and sprinkle with 1 tsp salt and pepper. Bake uncovered until the rollatini are heated through, about 15 minutes. Drizzle with more oil and serve.

My note: I didn't roll. I used eggplant and two other squash varieties and just layered everything and put the marinara on top.

Giada's Basic Marinara Sauce

(I think this is really nice and flavorful, use the fresh tomatoes from your CSA)

½ C Extra Virgin Olive Oil
2 small onions, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 celery sticks, finely chopped
2 carrots, peeled and finely chopped
½ tsp. sea salt, plus more to taste

4 C chopped tomatoes (approximately 1 ½ pounds)
2 dried bay leaves

In large pot, heat oil over a medium high flame. Add the onions and garlic and sauté until the onions are translucent, about 10 minutes. Add the celery, carrots, and ½ tsp. salt and pepper. Sauté until all the vegetables are soft, about 10 minutes. Add the tomatoes and bay leaves and simmer uncovered on low heat until the sauce thickens, about 1 hour. Remove and discard the bay leaves. Season with more salt and pepper to taste. (The sauce can be made 1 day ahead. Cool, then cover and refrigerate. Rewarm over medium heat before using.)

Enjoy!

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**Tomato Vegetable Casserole**

*From Sonii Nagel, Dale Texas*

*Another Everyday Italian recipe that I found surprisingly delicious. Use any veggies you have on hand but the sweet potato and regular potato were really good combined with the squash, bell pepper, carrot and onion. Try to cut the veggie the same size to ensure they cook evenly but don't get overcooked.*

1 medium potato, peeled and cut into ½" pieces.  
1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cut into ½" pieces  
2 carrots, peeled and cut into ½" pieces  
1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded and cut into ½" pieces  
4 T olive oil  
1 ¾ tsp freshly ground black pepper  
1 ½ tsp salt  
½ red onion, thinly sliced into rings  
1 large zucchini, cut crosswise into ¼" thick slices  
2 large ripe tomatoes, cut crosswise into ¼" thick slices  
½ C freshly grated parmesan cheese  
2 T bread crumbs, italian style or add some italian herbs  
sprig of fresh basil, for garnish

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. In a 13x9x2 inch glass baking dish, toss the potato, sweet potato, carrots, bell pepper, 2 T of the olive oil, ¾ tsp of pepper, and ½ tsp salt. Arrange the onion evenly on top, then top with zucchini. Drizzle w/ 1 T of the oil and sprinkle with ½ tsp of each salt and pepper. Arrange the tomato slices over the zucchini. Drizzle with the remaining 1 T of oil and sprinkle with the remaining ½ tsp each of salt and pepper.

In a small bowl, stir the parmesan and bread crumbs to blend and sprinkle over the veggies. Bake uncovered until the veggies are tender and the topping is golden brown, about 40 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes. Garnish with the fresh basil and serve. (I topped it off with some more freshly grated parmesan) Yum.

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Zucchini Sautéed with Fresh Mint

From Southern Living, April 2003, shared with us by CSA member Sue Young

1 ½ pounds small zucchini or other summer squash
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh Italian parsley
1 teaspoon chopped fresh mint leaves
1 tablespoon shredded fresh basil leaves
½ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper - or to taste

Cut zucchini lengthwise in half, and cut into 1/4-inch-thick wedges about 1 ½ inches long.

Sauté garlic in hot oil in a skillet over medium-high heat until lightly browned; stir in parsley, and cook about 30 seconds. Add zucchini, cook, stirring occasionally, 8 to 10 minutes or until tender.

Stir in 1 teaspoon chopped mint leaves and remaining ingredients; cook 30 seconds or until thoroughly heated.

Remove from heat, and serve immediately.

Yield

4 to 6 servings

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**Calabacitas con “Creamu201D; (Zucchini with Vegan “Creamu201D;)**

*Adapted by M. Klug from D. Kennedy and M. Kornfeld*

1 ½ lbs zucchini, trimmed and diced (about 5 ¼ cups)  
12 oz. Tomatoes, finely chopped (2 scant cups)  
6 peppercorns  
4 sprigs cilantro  
2 sprigs fresh mint  
½-inch piece of cinnamon stick  
4 whole cloves  
2 whole Serrano chiles (other chiles work fine)  
¾ cup Vegan Cream (see below)  
½ tsp salt, or to taste

Put the squash into a heavy pan with the other ingredients, reserving ¼ cup cream. Cover the pan with a tightly fitting lid and cook the mixture over low heat, scraping the bottom of the pan and stirring the mixture well from time to time so that it does not stick. If the vegetables are drying up too much, add a little water. It will take about 30 minutes to cook. Stir in remaining ¼ cup cream, if desired. This dish can be prepared well ahead of time, and is perhaps even better heated up the following day.

**Vegan Jalapeno-potato-tofu “creamu201D;**

1 large (8 oz) potato  
½ lb silken tofu  
1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice  
1 tsp rice vinegar  
2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil  
1 scallion or shallot, minced  
2 jalapenos, stems removed and seeded  
1 tsp salt

Boil the potato in salted water until it is tender, 20 to 30 minutes (I used the microwave for 8 minutes). Remove

the potato from the water (microwave) and, holding it with a dish towel, peel it. Cut the potato into chunks, place in a food processor, and add the remaining ingredients. Process until smooth and creamy. Taste and add more salt, if necessary. If too thick, add some water to attain cream consistency.

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Spaghetti Squash with Sofrito

Adapted from Kornfeld, "The Voluptuous Veganu201D; shared with us by CSA member Michael Klug

- 1 ½ lbs spaghetti squash (½ large or 1 small)
- ½ large red bell pepper (green or yellow banana substitute ok, with volume adjust), stem, seeds and membrane removed
- 2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbsp achiote seeds (optional) (buy these at Fiesta Market, spice section)
- ½ lbs plum tomatoes (3 to 4), peeled and seeded, or 4 canned plum tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 Scallions (white onion is ok substitute) minced

Preheat oven to 375 degrees, or use a well-insulated bbq grill

Place the whole squash on a parchment-covered backing sheet (on bbq grill just use parchment on the grill rack) and bake for 50 minutes to 1 hour, or until the squash is tender when pricked with a fork. Remove the squash from the oven, halve it lengthwise, and discard the seeds. (If using only half, rub the flesh with oil and place facedown on a parchment-covered baking sheet. Bake for 50 minutes to 1 hour or until the squash is tender.) Use a fork to scrape the flesh from the squash (it comes out in strands). Put it in a bowl and set aside.

Slice the pepper into thin lengthwise strips and then cut the strips into 1-inch pieces.

Combine the oil and achiote seeds in a small skillet and heat gently over low heat. As soon as the oil is warm and infused with orange color, pour it through a strainer. Discard the seeds. Return the oil to the skillet, add the tomatoes, peppers and garlic, and saute over medium heat for 5 to 7 minutes, or until the tomatoes are broken up and the peppers are softened. Add the spaghetti squash and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until warmed through and stewed together. Add salt and pepper. Stir in the scallions or onion.

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**Cucumber Salad**

*From intern Natalie's family reunion*

- 2 large or 4 small cucumbers, sliced
- 1 medium or 2 small onions, sliced
- 1 big or 2 medium red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 ¾ C apple cider vinegar
- ½ C olive oil
- ¼ C brown sugar
- ½ C honey

Combine all ingredients, refrigerate 24 hours before serving.

We would love to share your recipes too! Please email your favorites to [sarah@johnsonsbackyardgarden.com](mailto:sarah@johnsonsbackyardgarden.com)

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## Upcoming Events

### **July 19<sup>th</sup>, 9am: Third Annual Chicken Seminar**

Led by Diana Claitor, Paula Middleton, and Carol Ann Sayle, this free seminar will take place next to the Hen House at [The Natural Gardener](#). Bring a lawn chair!

### **July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2 – 4 pm: Heirloom Melon Festival** at Home Sweet Farm in Brenham, TX

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#### 10) Subscribe/Unsubscribe To Newsletter

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#### 11) Johnson's Backyard Garden Contact Information

Johnson's Backyard Garden

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