Hog's Back Almanac

ES BACK FAR

Winter 4 November 24, 2009

What's in the box and where does it go?

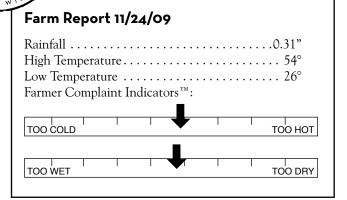
	Fridge?	Bag?	Notes & Varieties
Beets	Yes	Plastic	Red
Brussels	Yes	Plastic	
Sprouts			
Cabbage	Yes	Plastic	Red or Green
Carrots	Yes	Plastic	
Celeriac	Yes	Plastic	
Cornmeal	Yes	Paper	Mandan Bride
Garlic	No	No	
Herbs	Yes	Plastic	Sage and Thyme
Onions	No	No	Yellow and/or red
Peppers, dried	No	No	Cayenne
Potatoes	No	Paper	Russets
Radishes	Yes	Plastic	Black
Rutabagas	Yes	Plastic	
Shallots	No	No	
Sweet Potatoes	No	No	
Turnips	Yes	Plastic	
Winter Squash	No	No	Buttercup

Cornmeal

Wendell Berry has a great poem titled Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front. Manifesto was the right word since it has become just that amongst a generation of farmers of which I am one. One of my favorite lines from it is "So, friends, every day do something that won't compute." Many things we do on the farm don't compute in the sense that they're long-term investments in things which won't yield a windfall of profit.

Growing corn for cornmeal doesn't compute, nor do the brown beans we had in the box last time. Small amounts of crops which are generally only grown by large machines from seeds which have been modified and maximized for profit. The only reason we grow them is because I enjoy it.

I've been growing Mandan Bride corn ever since I worked for Riverbend Farm out in Delano. Greg always grew it there (still does) and I started to when I started up our CSA. I think we had it in our shares the first couple of years but now I think it's been at least 3 years



since we've had it. I've planted it every year but it took me a long time to figure out how to get enough of it to put in the shares. It turns out that since I don't grow sweet corn, I didn't really have any idea how to get the best pollination with corn. Last year it was much better and this year I think I've finally got it down. We had a good harvest of nice-sized ears and kept most of the raccoons out.

Last week we had time to fine-tune the old stone burr mill that I bought last fall. We tried grinding some last fall but it all came out of the mill tasting scorched. After doing some research I concluded this was because the stones needed to be 'dressed', which basically consists of roughing the stones where they've become smooth. Once you dress them you need to 'marry' the two stones with each other by bringing them together slowly and grinding them down further wherever they rub. After Jesse had logged a couple of days with it we were ready to go.

The first thing we do is to select the best cobs for seed for next year. We save a little bit of seed from a lot of cobs so that we have a large pool of genetic diversity. Second, all of the kernels have to be shelled off of the cobs. For this we use a hand-crank corn sheller which is an amazingly effective piece of 100-year-old appropriate technology. Then the corn is ready for grinding. The corn gets fed into the mill at about 10 pounds a minute and comes out the bottom as a nice mix of coarse and fine particles. Most store bought cornmeal would be sifted to separate out the different particle sizes, but we really like the combination of coarse and fine. We find that it adds texture and some color to the recipes that we make with it.

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Technically, Mandan Bride isn't the right kind of corn for cornmeal. It's a flour corn instead of a dent corn. The yellow stuff you get in the store is usually dent corn which has had the germ removed to improve it's shelf-life, our cornmeal is completely whole grain. If it wasn't so expensive to run a nutritional analysis I'd love to find out the nutrient content of our cornmeal.

Our two main uses for this cornmeal are for corn bread and polenta. It makes awesome versions of each. A cast iron skillet of Mandan Bride corn bread is a staple food at lunch time on harvest days around here. Because of the coarse size of some of the particles it does work best to presoak the cornmeal for an hour or two in whatever liquid the recipe you're preparing calls for when making corn bread. It's not necessary for polenta. Each share has two pounds of cornmeal, or about 8 cups.

As we head into the Thanksgiving holiday, I'm very thankful to have customers such as yourselves who enjoy and appreciate the fruits of our 'non-computing' endeavors.

Farm News

The big news is that this is the last share of the 2009 season! This is the first year that we've ended the winter share with the Thanksgiving week share. It seems silly now that we didn't do this before. It's a much more logical place to end the season.

The 2010 season is just around the corner now with the seed catalogs piling up on my desk. Look for a mailing from us in early January with signup info for 2010. We'll still be sending these out by snail mail to the primary contact listed on each share. We'll also let everyone know by email when these go out.

We gave thanks to our two faithful full-season employees, Jesse and Tricia, a week ago Friday with a nice dinner out to the Grand Cafe in Minneapolis. The meal was fabulous and featured many of our own ingredients. We don't do very much wholesaling but when we do it's mostly to Jon Radle at Grand and to Mike Phillips at Craftsman. They're both very good restaurants if you're looking for somewhere to go for your holiday outings.

The mild November weather continued last week and besides getting the corn milled we were able to get some other things done. The main thing was to get holes dug for the posts of the new greenhouse and get them cemented in. By Wednesday at 2pm we had nicely laid-out cemented-in posts. Now that that's out

of the way we can work on assembling the greenhouse when we get time or until it gets too cold to work. After all the rain and snow we got in October I never expected to get this far with it this fall.

Golden Northern Corn bread cooksillustrated.com

(Note: this is our favorite corn bread recipe, but as I said we do soak the cornmeal in the liquid for an hour or two ahead of time. We also have been eating less wheat and substituting a gluten-free flour mix such as Bob's Red Mill Gluten Free Biscuit and Baking Mix works very well.)

- 1 cup Mandan Bride cornmeal
- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 4 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon table salt
- 2 large eggs
- 2/3 cup buttermilk
- 2/3 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus extra softened butter for greasing the pan

Adjust oven rack to center position and heat to 425 degrees. Grease a 9-by-9-by-2-inch metal pan. Stir cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda, sugar, and salt in large bowl. Push dry ingredients up side of bowl to make a well. Crack eggs into well and stir lightly with wooden spoon, then add buttermilk and milk. Stir wet and dry ingredients quickly until almost combined. Add melted butter; stir until ingredients are just combined.

Pour batter into greased pan. Bake until top is golden brown and lightly cracked and edges have pulled away from side of pan, about 25 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack to cool slightly, 5 to 10 minutes. Cut corn bread into squares and serve warm.

Polenta With Parmesan & Butter cooksillustrated.com

6 cups water Table salt

- 1 1/2 cups stone-ground cornmeal
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into large chunks, plus more for final serving
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for final serving Ground black pepper

Bring the water to a rolling boil in a heavy-bottomed 4-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to the lowest possible setting, add 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, and pour the cornmeal into the water in a very slow stream from a measuring cup, all the while whisking in a circular motion to prevent lumps.

Cover and cook, vigorously stirring the polenta with a wooden spoon for about 10 seconds once every 5 minutes and making sure to scrape clean the bottom and corners of the pot, until the polenta has lost its raw cornmeal taste and becomes soft and smooth, about 30 minutes. Stir in the butter, Parmesan, salt, and pepper to taste. Divide the polenta among individual bowls and top each with a small pat of butter. Sprinkle generously with more grated Parmesan to taste and serve immediately.