

FRESH PROSPECTS

Week 9 – August 14, 2008

This Week:

- The Four Most Interesting Things You'll Ever Know About Celery
- The Greenest Block in Brooklyn
- Dispatches from an Ice Cream Queen
- News from Farmer Ted

The Four Most Interesting (and Perhaps Frivolous) Things You'll Ever Know About Celery

Ah, celery: Reveal yourself to us beyond tuna salad filler and bloody mary garnish! The celery that we all know and (mostly) love is *Apium graveolens* and it turns out this seemingly innocuous veg has much more personality than most of us are aware of.

1. Domesticated celery is cultivated in enormous quantities many places, but the closely related *Apium bermejoi* from the island of Minorca is one of the rarest plants in Europe—with only 60 individual specimens left.
2. Celery is one of three vegetables considered the holy trinity (along with onions and bell peppers) of Louisiana Creole and Cajun cuisine. It is also one of the three vegetables (together with onions and carrots) that constitute the French mirepoix, which is often used as a base for sauces and soups.
3. In Homer's *Iliad*, the horses of Myrmidons graze on wild celery that grows in the marshes of Troy, and in the *Odyssey* there is mention of meadows of violet and wild celery surrounding the cave of Calypso.
4. In classical Greece celery leaves were used as garlands for the dead, and the wreaths of the winners at the Isthmian Games were first made of celery before being replaced by crowns made of pine. According to Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* XIX.46), in Archaia the garland worn by the winners of the sacred contest at Nemea was also made of celery.

All facts from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celery>.

In addition to Farmer Ted's yummy Braised Celery recipe below, we offer you a delicious salad recipe that does this veg the justice it deserves!

Celery, Sesame and Tofu Salad

from *Gourmet*, June 2006

Tofu absorbs the richness of sesame oil and the tang of rice vinegar in a fresh salad that pops with crisp celery. Makes 4 side dish servings.

1 (14-oz) block of firm tofu

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
3/4 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
2 teaspoons rice vinegar (not seasoned)
1 teaspoon soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
4 large celery ribs
2 teaspoons sesame seeds, toasted

Rinse tofu and pat dry, then cut crosswise into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Arrange slices in 1 layer on a triple thickness of paper towels, then cover with another triple thickness of paper towels. Put a small baking sheet on top of tofu and weight with 3 (1-lb) cans (this removes excess moisture), 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, whisk together oils, vinegar, soy sauce, and pepper in a large bowl. Trim celery, then peel with a vegetable peeler and slice very thin diagonally. Cut tofu crosswise into 1/4-inch-wide sticks and transfer to a bowl. Toss gently with dressing, celery, sesame seeds, and salt to taste.

And Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Greenest Block in Brooklyn 2008 is . . .

8th street, between Prospect Park West and 8th Avenue, in Park Slope! This colorful residential block represents the first time in the 15 years of the contest that a block in Park Slope has won, with formidable East 25th Street in Flatbush taking the honors two of the past three years, and MacDonough Street between Stuyvesant and Lewis Avenues in Bed-Stuy winning top honors in '07.

Eighth street won largely because of dedicated & creative neighbor participation on the block, like "Wine & Mulch Nite," that brought both sides of the street together to help beautify the block. Walk, bike, or drive by to see the beauty for yourself!

For the Greenest Commercial Block, Best Window Box, Best Storefront and other top winners of the 2008—and to learn more about how your block can participate—contest, visit Brooklyn Botanic Garden's website. Prospect Heights could definitely be better represented in the contest, so put those greening caps on. . .

Dispatches from an Ice Cream Queen

Greetings, darlings! Ice Cream Queen here with the most marvelous of reports for you: apparently, it's possible to make delicious, smooth manna from heaven with nary an electrical outlet, bulky machine, or overlong freezing time. These instructions may sound a wee bit convoluted, but I assure you it's simple in effect, and yields delicious results—and these dog days do demand the occasional chilly treat, don't they?

With the beautiful berries and juicy stone fruit we've been receiving with fruit shares, it's a pinch to whip up your favorite seasonal flavor. Puree your fruit or simply add chopped pieces—either way, you'll be very happy you did.

Ice Cream in a Bag!

from "The Curious Cook: In the Summer Kitchen, the Thrill of the Chill"

New York Times, August 6, 2008

yield: one pint

3 to 4 pounds ice (10 cups or more)
1/2 cup table salt or 1 cup kosher salt, plus a pinch
1 cup milk
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract.

Pour all the ice into a large glass or plastic bowl, cover it with salt, and stir.

In a bowl, mix milk, heavy cream, sugar, vanilla extract and a pinch of salt together until sugar dissolves. Pour into a sealable 1-gallon freezer bag, push out as much air as possible, and seal.

Place a wide plastic bowl with a lid, like a salad spinner bowl, on a kitchen towel. Fill bowl with about half the ice. Lay freezer bag on ice and flatten it with your hand. Dump rest of the ice, along with any melted water, on top of bag, leaving zipper edge exposed. Place lid on the bowl. Let rest for 15 minutes, shaking it once or twice to redistribute ice and brine.

Pour about half the ice and brine into another bowl. Lift bag out by the zipper edge and lay it on a towel. (Avoid touching ice or brine, which are cold enough to cause frostbite.) Cover your hands with another towel and gently knead frozen areas for about a minute to mix them with liquid.

Return freezer bag to bowl, laying it flat on ice. Cover it with reserved ice and brine. Put lid on bowl and freeze as above for another 15 minutes.

Remove bag and carefully towel off the brine. Serve ice cream, or keep bag in freezer until ready to serve.

Note: You can use this method to freeze any ice cream or sorbet mix. If you make ice cream regularly, you can eliminate ice cubes and reuse salt. Make a brine with 3 quarts water and 1 pound salt, divide it between two 1-gallon freezer bags, and store bags flat in freezer. To make ice cream, sandwich the bag of mix between brine bags, enclosing stack in towels.

News from Farmer Ted

In this week's edition, Ted muses over the unusually wet conditions we've seen this summer and dares to call himself grumpy! He also reminds us about the festivities at Windflower Farm in two weeks and includes a fabulous celery recipe. Thanks, Ted!

Heavy rains fell all afternoon today. Rainfall every weekend has, I expect, made some of you irritable. A wet July and record-setting rainfall so far in August have certainly made this farmer grumpy. Crops suffer when conditions remain wet for a long time.

Diseases settle in, nutrients wash away, tomatoes crack. Rainfall over the last 90 days has been 10" above normal. To go outdoors is to sink to our knees in mud. An excavator and bulldozer sit in the backyard. We've hired our neighbor, Tom, to repair our pond and to improve the drainage around our barns and greenhouses. Soils are so saturated that water runs in a torrent through the shallow ditch he has dug.

In your shares this week are celery (which seems to thrive in all this rain), assorted tomatoes and basil (which cannot stand the rain), bell peppers and eggplants (which, for now, just get bigger and bigger with each rain), scallions or onions, snap beans, a mix of lettuces, and assorted cooking greens. We will send larger bunches of basil next week. Consider making a batch of pesto. We'll also send tomatoes, peppers, yellow onions, red cabbages, green beans and salad greens.

You are invited to the Windflower Farm open house on the weekend of August 23-24. Come for the day or bring a tent and sleeping bag and stay all weekend. Note that showers are not available at the farm this year. For those not wanting to camp, a bed and breakfast or motel can be found in the area. Google bed and breakfast or motel and the name of one of our nearby villages for lists (we are midway between Saratoga Springs and Arlington, Vermont, and near the villages of Greenwich and Cambridge). Open house activities will start in the early afternoon on Saturday with a farm tour and a trip to the Battenkill for swimming. We'll have a potluck dinner, followed by an evening with music and a bonfire (BYOB). We'll make a big farm breakfast on Sunday, followed by farm tours and a trip to the Washington County Fair. Please send me an e-mail if you are planning to come (windflowerfarm@earthlink.net). We hope you can make it."

Braised Celery

from farmers Amy and Scott Richards, in *Recipes from America's Small Farms*
serves 4

1 head celery
3 bacon slices, quartered, or two tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
¾ cup vegetable stock
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley or 1 teaspoon dried parsley
salt and freshly milled black pepper.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Rinse, drain and trim the celery. Cut the stalks into 2-inch pieces.

Sauté the bacon in a large, heavy ovenproof skillet for 4 to 5 minutes, until it begins to brown (or melt the butter). Add the celery and onion and sauté until the onion begins to brown, 3 to 4 minutes.

Pour the stock over the mixture. Cover the skillet with an ovenproof lid or aluminum foil and braise the vegetables in the oven for 20 to 25 minutes, until the celery is tender. Stir in the parsley, season with salt and pepper to taste.

UNTIL NEXT WEEK, we wish you all happy veggie eating...