



SWALLOWTAIL FARM

All the Food that's Fit to Eat

Week of January 13th, 2010

THIS WEEKS BASKET

Salad Mix

Arugula

Carrots

Herb Medley

Mung Bean Sprouts

Grapefruit

RECIPES:

Fresh Citrus Smoothie

- 1 1/3 cups fresh red grapefruit juice, roughly 1 large grapefruit
- 8 large strawberries
- 2 medium bananas, sliced
- 1 (8 ounce) container yogurt
- 1 squeeze fresh lemon
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 cup crushed ice

Zesty Carrot Coleslaw

- 1 medium sized bunch baby carrots, shredded.
- 1 cup of green cabbage, shredded.
- 1/2 cup of red cabbage, shredded.
- 1/2 cup of light mayonnaise or vegannaise
- 1 tablespoon of whole milk.
- 1 tablespoon of lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon of sugar or honey.
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste.

In a large bowl, combine the shredded vegetables.

Whisk together the remaining ingredients and pour over the salad.

Refrigerate for 1 hour before serving.



Give fools their gold, and knaves their power;
let fortune's bubbles rise and fall;
who sows a field, or trains a flower,
or plants a tree, is more than all.

—John Greenleaf Whittier

That's a buncha...

I want to talk shit. Not in a competitive sense, but really about the poop itself. There are few realms outside of gardening in which it is actually acceptable to speak of it. We might as well jump in wholeheartedly...

There is an uncomfortable shuffling of feet that happens around the subject of fertility and what it means to require inputs into the soil in order to grow food. Whether conventional or organic, the topic is touchy, because there is a certain inevitability of complicity in some unwholesome process of industry involved whenever we begin to use the amounts of fertilizer needed in any scale of farming beyond the home garden. Let me explain. In the case of conventional farming, it is a simple and obvious connection. Chemical fertilizers are created from destructively mined minerals, and synthesized with the burning of inordinate quantities of fossil fuels. The production of synthetic ammonia alone constitutes 2% of the total energy usage of the globe, and 5% of all natural gas consumption. If we want to go ahead and be honest about root causes and follow things to their sources, we are then of course brought to consider war, and the itchy truth that wars plague and cling to resource-rich areas (The Middle East, Sudan, Darfur, etc.) like, well, flies on shit.

These are just some of the more abstract motivations for farming organically in the first place, not to mention ecological and human health, and other more immediate and evident issues. Even so, once we make the natural step of embracing old wisdom and using organic sources of fertility, there is still the question of where all of the material will come from. The majority of organic farms (commerce is implied here) use chicken manure as their main source of fertility. Many use nothing but chicken manure. It is particularly potent stuff, and certainly without thinking too hard about it, it fits effortlessly into our notions of what a farm is, for who imagines Old McDonald's without hens? If we are thorough in our consideration of why this is so, however, the romantic picture becomes tarnished readily enough. Generally speaking, any plot large enough to grow food for market, whether to wholesalers, or to General Mills, or even a CSA, is going to require enough manure that it becomes impractical to collect it, compost it, and spread it by farmer labor alone. Which means that in most cases, farms have their manure delivered to the farm in giant loads at a time, by dumptrucks. This necessitates having a big enough pile collected that it can be loaded by a tractor into the truck, which means in short that it is coming from an industrial operation. For chicken manure, specifically, it means it's coming from a poultry house. The implications of this are too grimy to really explore deeply, but suffice to say, it involves inhumane living conditions, hormones and antibiotics, more often than not.

So what are the alternatives? Well, cow manure tells a similar tale, once we follow it back to where it falls from. To achieve the volumes that allow for deliverable loads, it essentially means that it is coming from a place where the animals are confined and the manure can be easily collected as waste. For cows, this means a dairy. I don't know how many of you have visited an industrial dairy, but they stink, in more ways than just the one. And you have the same sad truths of inhumane treatment, hormones, and antibiotics as we have with chickens.

Of course, there are plenty of other types of manure that can be employed for the purpose of agriculture. In fact, any poop is good fertilizer. But there are very few other types of animals whose manure is so easily collected, and therefore able to be distributed in an efficient manner. Horse shit, you say. Which is almost true, except that virtually no one will deliver it. Still, it is probably the most abundantly available type of manure that does not derive

from an industrial process. The horses are being treated well, we can assume, and though they are still more often than not being de-wormed and treated with antibiotics, we can easily say with confidence that a horse stable is a healthier situation than either a poultry house or a dairy. Which means that the main impediment to more widespread use of horse manure is simply the inconvenience of having to go and load it and unload it and spread it. Working through this process with 6 to 15 tons per acre per season constitutes a large enough pain in the rear for many farmers that it's just not done often. By contrast, if you order chicken manure from Lake Butler Farm Center, they will provide the service of delivery and spreading it over your fields prior to tilling for a mere \$10 extra per yard.

Bat guano is another superb manure, and we are fortunate to have the resource of the bat house on campus here. Still, it is only available from the university in 5 gallon bucket quantities at a time, and is therefore really only able to serve as a supplementary source of fertility. The same holds true for any number of a multitude of other great organic fertilizers, from fish emulsion to kelp, bone, blood, feather, or cottonseed meal, to peat moss and worm castings. Even each of these has a story to tell. We should not be afraid to consider what these stories are. In fact, I see it as a collective responsibility we have, to be aware of how we accomplish things, so that we might be able to refine our ways of living, and improve.

All things considered, it is no wonder that we don't talk a whole lot about the sources of fertility for the organic food that we eat... And yet, the downside to organic agriculture is downright cheery in comparison to the damage accomplished through conventional methods.

All of this brings me to a recurring theme of these writings, which is the idea of the farm as a wholistic entity, a living organism that provides its own fertility through the elements of the farm itself. Now, clearly we must understand that this is an ideal, and that in order to achieve such an ideal, it takes tremendous forethought, herculean commitment, and above all, time. Lots of time. With this understanding though, we can commit ourselves to the effort of considering what is required to create such a thing. Animals, for one. And so facilities for animals, and good composting practices, and so on. For the moment, we are doing the best we can, which is to say, we are using many of the different types of manures, guano, meals, and worm castings discussed above, in combination with cover cropping and green manures. We have been very conservative in the use of anything that we feel has a downside, and we have made the effort to go and collect horse manure from good stables. We are making compost by the Biodynamic method, applying the Biodynamic Preparations to our pile, and using Efficient Microorganisms (EM) to stimulate the proliferation of beneficial microbes in the soil, which helps to boost the photosynthetic capacity of plants. We plant by the Biodynamic calendar, which takes into consideration the planetary forces, and the relationship of Earth to the cosmos. We are doing what we understand to be the best practices possible given the newborn nature of this farm. And we feel good about it. But I wanted to let you all have a whiff of the complexity of something so seemingly simple as poop for the very reason that it is such a simple thing, and yet it creates so many challenges to our notions of what it is we are seeking to create in our striving for a more sustainable culture.

Hope I wasn't on the toilet too long. With love,

Noah Shitama
Swallowtail Farmer

