

Two Onion Farm

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Week of July 15th, 2007

Cabbageworms

You're receiving broccoli and cabbage in this week's box. These vegetables are both members of the same biological species, *Brassica oleracea*, which also includes cauliflower, kohlrabi, Brussels Sprouts, kale, and collard greens. All of these plants are almost indistinguishable as seedlings, but mature into the different familiar vegetables. They all share a slightly mustardy flavor. They are also preyed upon by the same insect pests, including the imported cabbageworm. This is the small pale green worm which you may have found inside a head of broccoli at some point in your life.

The cabbageworm is actually a caterpillar, the larva of the cabbage white butterfly, which is an extremely common butterfly in meadows and vegetable fields of our region. The cabbage whites search out broccoli, cabbage, and related crops, as well as related wild plants, and lay their eggs on them. The eggs hatch into the cabbageworms, which feed on the plant for some time, pupate, and hatch into adult butterflies to begin the cycle anew.

Cabbage whites and cabbageworms are extremely common in our region, and it's virtually impossible to grow sizable plantings of broccoli, cabbage, and related crops without attracting an infestation. The populations build up over the season, and by summer's end we have a horde of cabbage whites fluttering ecstatically over our broccoli plantings. If left unchecked, many plants would be almost entirely defoliated, yields would be greatly

reduced, and the heads that we were able to harvest would be infested with cabbageworms.

To keep the cabbageworms in check, we use a natural biological control, a bacteria called *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt for short). Bt is a pathogen of cabbageworms and other caterpillars. It infects caterpillars, interferes with the functioning of their digestive system, and kills them. Commercially, Bt is raised in cultures, dried, and ground into powder. We buy the powdered Bt, mix it with water, and spray it on vegetables which are eaten by the cabbageworms. Bt controls the cabbageworms effectively, but it is washed away by rain and degraded by sunlight rapidly, so we need to reapply it every 7-10 days.

The Bt is not 100% effective. With an enormous population of butterflies laying eggs, there will inevitably be some cabbageworms which escape, because, for example, they are sheltered underneath a leaf and do not ingest the Bt. We do our best to check for cabbageworms at harvest and discard infested heads, but again, it's impossible to do this completely thoroughly without taking apart every cabbage and broccoli head leaf by leaf and floret by floret. If you do find a cabbageworm, please bear with us. You can discard them. We work to keep the cabbageworms under control, but they're a part of life for cabbages, cabbage growers, and cabbage eaters.

In this week's box:

Vegetable	Refrigerate?	Store In Plastic Bag To Retain Moisture?	Approx. Storage Life	Comments
Lettuce	Yes	Yes	1 wk	Red and/or green summercrisp lettuce
Broccoli	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Green Beans	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Eggplant	Yes or No	No	1 wk	Oblong fruit with light purple skin; or long and dark purplish-black
Dill	Yes	Yes	<1 wk	
Red Onions	Yes	Yes or No	2 wks	
Cucumbers	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Summer squash	Yes	Yes	<1 wk	Yellow & green summer squash or zucchini.
Cabbage	Yes	Yes	2 wks	

The **onions** are uncured, freshly harvested bulbs, which means they should be stored in the fridge to prolong their storage life. Cured onions, which we distribute later in the season, are harvested fully mature and then allowed to dry in a warm, well ventilated place for several weeks. During curing, the outer layers of the bulb dry and harden, protecting the bulb from infection and moisture loss. Cured onions will store much longer than uncured. Garlic is also cured after harvest to prolong its storage life. Last week we harvested our entire garlic crop. We gave out some as fresh garlic in last week's boxes, and the rest is curing in our shed now.

Eggplant is excellent marinated and grilled. You can sauté eggplant until lightly browned and then season with salt and pepper, parsley, and/or parmesan cheese. You can also bread the eggplant in flour, egg, and/or bread crumbs before sautéing. Don't eat it raw – it's bitter and slightly toxic if it has not been cooked.

This week's **cabbage** is the Tendersweet variety, with thin, delicate leaves. It's suited for salads and cole slaws or for light cooking.

Fresh **dill** is an excellent addition to cole slaws, cabbage salad, and cucumber salads. You can also sprinkle a little chopped dill on a dish of broccoli with melted cheese.

Relevant recipes from past newsletters, available on our website: Grilled Lemony Eggplant (7/16/2006), Grilled Eggplant Sandwich (7/25/2005), Green Bean Salad

(8/8/2005), Broccoli with Onion and Butter (7/8/2007 – last week's newsletter).

Chicken and Broccoli Stir-Fry

Serve over rice.

1 lb chicken breast (or tofu) in bite size pieces
 1 Tbsp soy sauce
 1 Tbsp sesame oil
 1/2 tsp corn starch
 1/2 Tbsp oil
 5 cups of small broccoli florets
 3/4 cup chicken broth
 Salt (optional)
 1 Tbsp oil
 1 tsp corn starch mixed with 1 Tbsp water

If possible, marinate the chicken (or tofu) for several hours in soy sauce, sesame oil, and 1/2 tsp of the corn starch.

Heat 1/2 Tbsp oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add broccoli and stir-fry for one minute. Add broth and optional salt. Cover and cook 2-4 minutes, stirring every minute or so, until broccoli is almost at desired texture. Remove broccoli from pan.

Add 1 Tbsp oil and chicken (or tofu). Stir-fry for two minutes or more, to cook chicken through. Add broccoli and cook for 1 minute more. Form the broccoli and chicken into a ring with a hole in the middle. Pour corn starch-water mixture into middle. Mix together and continue cooking until corn starch thickens. Serve warm.