

Two Onion Farm

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Week of July 8, 2012

The weather has finally cooled down to seasonable summer temperatures. It's much easier to work, think, and breathe for us and our employees. The vegetables are happier, too. Last week's excessive heat forced us to delay several plantings because very high temperatures in the soil inhibit germination of many seeds. The heat also prevented tomato and pepper plants from forming fruits from their flowers. Fortunately the plants had formed many fruits prior to the heatwave and they should still form more now that cooler temperatures have returned. The high heat also affected the produce we're harvesting this week: you may find that some of the inner leaves in your lettuce heads have brown edges. This is tipburn, and occurs when the lettuce plant is stressed by very high heat. Some of the broccoli heads we're harvesting this week appear irregular and deformed; and this is also a symptom of heat exposure.

About water: It seems like we never have the right amount of rain! In some years, excessive rainfall can be a major problem because wet soils prevent us from tilling and planting on schedule and because excessive moisture on leaves and in the soil promotes many plant diseases. And in every year we end up irrigating at some point because there is at least a short dry spell. Currently we are fervently hoping for rain and irrigating heavily. We've had less than 1" of rain total since May 27th. Plants' water use varies widely depending on their size and developmental stage, but rapidly growing, large crops demand a quarter inch or more of water from the soil on each hot sunny summer day. In other words, all the water we've received in the last 45 days would keep a large plant happy for about three days. That's a major deficit. Right now, the vegetables which require the most frequent irrigation are tomato, pepper, and squash, which are growing vigorously and forming their fruits, and also our newly transplanted fall vegetables, such as broccoli and cabbage, which do not yet have well-established root systems and can dry out quickly. Fortunately, we routinely install drip irrigation on almost all of our vegetable and fruit plantings. Each row of plants has a dripline laid next to it. To irrigate, we let water flow into the dripline and from there it slowly and continuously drips out into the soil around the crop's roots. The major advantage of drip irrigation above overhead, sprinkler irrigation is that drip irrigation conserves water because it concentrates water in the area where the crop's roots are growing, whereas sprinklers must irrigate an entire area, including the bare soil in between rows. Much of the water from sprinklers is also lost into the air through evaporation before the water even touches the ground. Our water supply is generally adequate to keep everything well watered even during extreme conditions such as last week's heat. However, with constant irrigation we need to worry about whether the water level in our well will remain adequate. So, we hope for rain, but unfortunately the next two weeks are expected to remain drier than average.

Our summer crops are ripening quickly. The tomato harvest from our hoopouses and from the field is steadily increasing and we're harvesting both cherry tomatoes and larger, slicing tomatoes this week. We're expecting to harvest plenty of both types of tomatoes in the weeks ahead. Our first eggplant harvest is this week. We expect to begin picking peppers in a week or so. Our cucumber and summer squash yields are lower than expected because we're battling a severe infestation of cucumber beetles this year. The beetles have stunted a number of our plants and they also cause the surface scratching and scarring which you may see on some cucumbers. We have some younger plants which we've covered to exclude the beetles and we hope those will produce well later in the season.

In this week's box:

Vegetable	Refrigerate?	Store In Plastic Bag To Retain Moisture?	Approx. Storage Life	Comments
Bean	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Beets	Yes	Yes	2+ wks	Red, round
Broccoli	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Carrot	Yes	Yes	2 wks	
Cucumber	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Dill	Yes	Yes	<1 wk	
Eggplant	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Garlic	?	No	2+ wks	
Lettuce	Yes	Yes	1 wk	Summercrisp
Onion, red	Yes	Yes	1 wk	
Summer squash	Yes	Yes	1 wk	Not in all boxes
Tomato	?	No	<1 wk	Cherry and/or slicing tomatoes. Refrigeration will prolong lifespan but decrease flavor

Green Beans and Summer Squash

1 Tbsp olive oil
 1/2 lbs green beans, trimmed and halved
 1 small summer squash, halved lengthwise,
 then cut into 1/2-inch slices
 1 clove garlic, minced
 Salt and pepper
 1/4 cup chicken or vegetable broth
 1/2 tsp dried marjoram

Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add beans, squash, garlic, salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables begin to brown, about 3 minutes.

Add broth, cover and reduce heat. Cook until beans are tender-crisp, 4-5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in marjoram.

Broccoli with Garlic Butter and Almonds

1-1/2 lbs broccoli, cut into bite size pieces
 1/3 cup butter
 1 Tbsp brown sugar
 2-3 Tbsp soy sauce
 2 tsp white vinegar
 1/4 tsp black pepper
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1/3 cup chopped almonds

Steam broccoli until tender but still crisp. Drain and arrange broccoli on serving platter.

Melt butter in a small skillet over medium heat. Mix in brown sugar, soy sauce, vinegar, pepper and garlic. Bring to boil, then remove from heat.

Mix in almonds, and pour sauce over broccoli.

For more recipes, see our website www.twoonionfarm.com. You can view the recipes from all of our past newsletters.