

Updates from

PLEASANT VALLEY FARM



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Hello Friends!

Spring is officially here! We are getting excited and can't wait to get out in the fields to get this year's planting underway. Spring also means babies, and that is always a great time of year. So far, we've welcomed some incredibly cute lambs to the flock as well as some adorable baby bunnies. Spring also means hatching season, and we'll soon be offering live baby birds for sale, including Phoenix, Barred Rock and Delaware chicks as well as Bourbon Red turkey poults. Peachicks (baby peacocks) will be available later in the hatching season. Email or call us for more information on purchasing poultry.

We had a great time at the Farm to Table Conference in Pittsburgh again this year. We were super excited to be featured in an article in the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review in the week leading up to the event. Not only was Emily quoted extensively, but a picture of the horses working the garden appeared along with the article, complete with Dixie & Dolly's names! Emily's speech on heirloom vegetables was well-attended and well received. We were excited to meet so many new folks interested in great local food, and we want to welcome all of you who signed up for this email newsletter there!

We are so excited to have greenhouse production underway. After renovating our small greenhouse, we have been starting lots of early vegetables, herbs and even some flowers. We're hoping to offer bedding plants later in the spring, so watch the newsletter (or our Facebook page!) for more details!

See you at the stand!

-Emily



SPRING HAPPENINGS:

- ◆ Live chicks are here and turkey poults available soon— contact us to order yours
- ◆ Online Store now open— refined canned products and feather jewelry any-time!
- ◆ New this spring...bedding plants!
- ◆ Farm Stand reopens Saturday, May 26

New Varieties for 2012

Each year, we try some new vegetables and vegetable varieties and this spring's seed order is no different. Here are just some of the new items we hope to be offering this year:

Rose Finn Apple Fingerling Potato— this heirloom variety is a great-keeping fingerling. Its waxy texture makes it a great choice for potato salad or roasted.

Dragon's Tongue Bean— a Dutch wax type of green bean, this heirloom features vivid purple stripes that disappear when blanched.

Mammoth Sandwich Island Salsify— another heirloom, this vegetable has long, white ta-

pered roots (like a carrot). It's known as the "vegetable oyster" because of its remarkable, oyster-like taste.

While our salad mixes will continue to offer many varieties, we wanted to try some new heat tolerant varieties for more summer greens. So, this year we will be planting **Red Sails** and **Nevada lettuce**. We're also expanding our leafy offerings with **Mache** and **Sorrel**. Sorrel is a perennial with a bright, lemony flavor while mache, also known as corn salad, is a cool weather salad green that adds a nutty flavor.

We're also looking forward to offering garlic later this summer. We planted two heirloom strains: **German Extra Hardy** and **Chesnok Red garlic** last fall. The German white is a hardneck with strong flavor and is great for roasting. The Chesnok is a beautiful purple-red bulb. It's easy to peel, and holds its flavor during cooking, making it great for baking.



PLEASANT VALLEY FARM

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Greenhouse Renovation

We are so excited to have completed a major project this spring – greenhouse renovation. The small greenhouse directly behind the house was first, because we use it to start our seedlings (things like tomatoes, peppers and more). We removed all of the old, brittle plastic. The wooden frame is still in great shape, so we moved it back a bit to a higher, drier portion of the backyard. We put down a floor of underlayment fabric to shade out weeds. Then it was time to replace the plastic and put the workbenches back in.

The next project was construction of a new 65' greenhouse. We prepped the soil

where the greenhouse was to be placed with lots of organic material to nourish the soil. We took the frames from the old greenhouses down, and recycled the parts in the best shape to be the frame for this one. We will be covering it with heavy-duty greenhouse plastic. We're



Our new sprout starting greenhouse

excited to start working the soil inside soon, as we will be using it to put plants directly in the soil inside, not in pots. The greenhouse will warm the soil and enable use to shield our plants from late frosts, so we will be able to get some very frost-sensitive plants growing much earlier in the growing season. We aim to have tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers available earlier in the season.

Our seed starting greenhouse has also allowed us to start more plants earlier in the season, so look for bedding plants to be available here at the farm. We anticipate offering vegetables, herbs and even a few flowers!

IF YOU DON'T
 GROW THEM
 YOURSELF, SMALL,
 LOCAL FARMS ARE
 YOUR ONLY WAY OF
 TASTING THESE
 GEMS

Why Heirlooms are Important

We try new seed varieties every year. It happens for a number of reasons– sometimes a favorite seed variety is no longer offered, sometimes we are looking to get a more productive variety of a vegetable, and sometimes we are just curious about something new. Many times, when we are looking for a new variety, we look for heirloom varieties.

An heirloom is a variety that has been bred for 50 years or more, and is open pollinated, meaning that the vegetables pollinate by wind or bee and the seeds can be planted the next year and produce the same variety. Most commercial varieties are hybrids, a cross between two varieties to produce something that is more productive, have consistently similar sized fruit or disease resistant. These plants also produce seeds, but if you plant them the result will be a

totally different plant, which may not even produce edible vegetables.

A major advantage for a small farm like us is that we can greatly reduce the cost of ordering seeds in the spring by simply saving seeds from our own plants the year before. We currently have strains of many different plants we have saved ourselves, including Provider beans, Earth Tones Dent Corn and Smoke Signals Popcorn, Chives and Giant Pink Banana Squash to name a few. By saving seed from the plants that do the best on our farm, we can end up with a strain perfectly suited to the climate on our farm.

Planting heirlooms is also important because many of these seed varieties are dying out. Big farms want uniform plants and so only plant a few hybrid

varieties. If a plant disease or severe weather would sweep the country, all those plants would be equally likely to be affected– they are all related. (This was a major part of the Irish Potato Famine.) But planting many varieties increases the odds that some will survive– or thrive– under those same conditions.

The best part however, is the history (not to mention flavor!) of these old-time plants. My favorite lettuce to plant, Grandpa Admire's, has a history of being grown by a family in this country since before the Civil War. Now that's history you can literally sink your teeth into!

If you don't grow them yourself, small, local farms are your only way of tasting these gems. They don't hold up to shipping and storage, so they are always farm-fresh. They have also been selected for flavor over the years, and the tastes are incredible.



SIGNS OF SPRING ON THE FARM!



A healthy ram lamb



Baby plants in the greenhouse...and Puff!



Is there anything cuter than baby bunnies?



The greenhouse takes shape



Rosa's ewe lamb



Our fist chicks of the season