

Meanwhile Back at the Farm...January 31, 2001

Howdy Folks,

Have you noticed how the light has begun to change? There's this feeling around the heart of winter that there just isn't enough light during the short number of hours that the sun is up. Everything feels this, even the plants and creatures in the garden. I believe that people need to have sunlight in sufficient quantity sort of like they need food. Of course most of us have heard of people who have a medical disorder called Seasonal Affective Disorder or S.A.D. Sort of a low grade depression during the winter. Right around now this whole thing starts to lift. Right about now, actually on February 4th, plants in this area start to noticeably grow where they have only been in a sort of suspended animation up until now.

Since we are around all of our plants daily we can actually see the difference. It's almost like all the plants are at the starting line, storing up energy, sucking up water, all waiting for the starting signal to begin really photosynthesizing again. On February 4th they really take off.

Well not like a racecar, more like a big boat. At first the engines don't seem to be doing much even though they are spinning at full throttle. But then there is motion and a little more and a bit more and all of the natural systems throttle up some. The whole of the ecosystem starts lighting up with retained heat, new enzyme and hormonal energy. The whole watershed including the trees warm to a lift off. Then there is no stopping it.

In our area it is very rare to have frosts after about February 8th and the soil warms enough to plant some seeds right around this time. Fruit trees bud out and start gathering sun on the leaves, which warms all the fluid in the trunk and keeps the air warm at night.

It also signals the time for us to crank up the workload. We plant out the early-planted seedlings now like Ryan and I did this week. We plant up lots of flats of plants that need the soil to warm a little more before transplanting. It gives us quite a head start over waiting for the soil to warm enough to germinate seeds. Things like cucumbers, summer squash, and of course the tomatoes, peppers and eggplants are started indoors now where it is warm enough to sprout the seeds.

So I get really excited when I see the quality of the light change this time of year. For me, on a clear day like this, the bay area takes on an almost surreal beauty. Maybe it's the joy of the end of "winter" everything reflects in some almost visible spectrum which makes life look clearer, sharper and somehow more real.

The additional good news this week is that more of the beds I replanted with various mustard family vegetables have germinated. The beds with salad mix have not. I think they are in the hot spot at the center of the Symphylans infestation we have been discussing.

At the Eco Farm Conference I just attended I went to a

workshop that probably should have been called the symphylans support group. 50 farmers and others in the room with three great researchers who filled us in on the biology of the creature. Although the researchers have tried different strategies and had come up with a few suggestions, the great majority of the participants shared their various experiences with the bug. I even had some stuff to contribute.

The long and the short of it is that there is no magic solution for the pest. Even the strategy we are trying is experimental and has failed for others in the room. Some of the important things I learned is that the pest is both a deep soil dweller, it can't penetrate compacted soil which is still loose enough to grow plants and it likes cool to cold weather. An example was that weeds only came up in a bed where there were footprints and only in the footprints themselves. The compacted footprints deterred the little devils.

Late in the spring the pest disappears as the soil warms. I think disappears means it goes deeper in the soil than is easily detected and below most plant roots. We can make use of these facts to devise strategies to work around them until nature creates a balance. Something has to eat them and I would theorize that something we do to prepare the soil kills some sort of predator that would otherwise control them. Maybe we need to give up using the tiller, which has made our life easier.

This week two volunteers, Bert Mazzoco and Diane Soloman will be starting the clean up and organize our accounting in preparation for being able to put in grant funding requests. I can't tell you how much this means to me. This is a great step forward for the IIEA to have their help.

Does anyone know a good real estate agent for the Peninsula and Coast? It's time for us to start looking for a new home. So we could use a buyer's agent. Give us a call 650-365-2993

The Food

Lettuce: Red Looseleaf

Swiss Chard: So Beautiful.

Potatoes: Reds

Mustard: Osaka purple mustard. Spicy raw and very savory cooked. One of the best of the spicy mustards and not available in stores. When you see purple mustard in the stores, it's usually Red Giant variety, which is not as nice.

Carrots: From another organic farm. Ours won't be ready for another month or two. Wait until you taste ours. These are good but they are no comparison for ours.

Brussels Sprouts: Check out JP's recipe. After all this cold weather they should be extra tasty.

Turnips: These are the last of the winter crop of Hakurei turnips. Never fear, we have planted many more for the spring.

Check out this Event.

Join us for the Center for Informed Food Choices' Kickoff Fundraising Dinner!

The Center for Informed Food Choices, a new nonprofit dedicated to providing Bay Area residents with practical tools to transition to a plant-based diet, will host its premiere Chefs' Choice Dinner on Sunday, February 25. Enjoy a delicious and bountiful vegan dinner prepared by several of our most talented food instructors and expert chefs.

Also, participate in a fun silent auction featuring lots of high-quality items, including gift certificates to area restaurants, decadent food gift baskets, and lovely artwork. Proceeds will go toward the purchase of cooking equipment and supplies for our Tasty Cooking for Optimum Health program. We already have several Bay Area hospitals scheduled to offer our cooking classes. Help us further this important work and enjoy a great meal and fun event in the process!

Menu and Chefs:

*Appetizers by Ann Dunn and Sascha Weiss, of Urban Kitchen:

- Wasabi potatoes on won ton wrappers with sweet red onion chutney
- Asian spring rolls with tamarind-peanut dipping sauce
- Purple potatoes with cashew cream and chives

*Seasonal Vegetable Turnover with Fresh Herb Aioli, by Marc Swan, former head chef of Valentine's Cafe

*Nutty Wild Rice Confetti with Smoked Tofu, by Linda Hillel, soyfoods expert extraordinaire!

*Mixed Green Salad with Lemon Dressing, by Susanne Jensen, of Susanne's Natural Foods

*Orange Pecan Double Chocolate Chip Cookies, by Meredith McCarty, author of the award-winning cookbook, "Sweet and Natural"

*and more....

When: Sunday, February 25, 6 to 9pm

Where: The historic First Unitarian Church of Oakland
685 14th Street, corner of Castro Street in Oakland

Cost: \$30 per person (additional donations appreciated)

To RSVP: Please send check payable to "CIFC" with your name, address, phone number, and email address by Saturday, February 10 to:

Center for Informed Food Choices
P.O. Box 16053
Oakland, CA 94610

Questions? Contact Michele Simon at michele@informedeating.org or (510) 465-0322.

Visit our Web site at www.informedeating.org for more information about CIFC.

Directions and miscellaneous information:

We'll gather in the lovely Wendte room, adorned with stained glass windows and high redwood-beamed ceilings. Tickets are not needed; your name will be on our guest list when you check in. Also, since we don't yet accept credit cards, please remember to bring your checkbook to participate in the fun silent auction!

If you're driving, there's plenty of street parking in the area, in addition to lots. The church is also accessible by BART, if you don't mind walking a few blocks.

BART:

Exit at the 12th Street/Oakland City Center station
Walk several blocks west on 14th Street, to the other side of the Federal Building.

From San Francisco:

From the Bay Bridge, follow signs to 580/980.
Take 980 Downtown Oakland to the 14th Street exit.
Go straight on Frontage Road to 14th Street.
Turn left, going over the freeway.

The church is on the corner of Castro and 14th, next to the freeway.

From the East and Marin:

Take 80 to 980 Downtown Oakland, to the 14th Street exit.
Follow directions above.

From the South:

Take 580 to 980/24
At the sharp right hand curve in the freeway, take the 14th Street exit.
Go straight on Frontage Road to 14th Street
The church is on the corner of Castro and 14th, next to the freeway