Notes from the Field by Tina Singleton, First Year Apprentice

I learned how to garden in a war zone, behind the high walls and barbed wire of my compound in Kabul, Afghanistan. At the time, in 2010, I was the Director of the Afghan Women’s Writing Project, that provided online and in person writing workshops to Afghan girls and women who wanted to tell their own story, in their own words, not the media’s. In front of my house, a two-bedroom single story with windows that looked out onto rose bushes, mulberry and pomegranate trees, there was a space that looked perfect for a garden. I had never gardened before, and up to that point I had killed every potted plant I ever had. But I learned how to garden through the wisdom of my elder Afghan gardener Meraj, who showed me how to plant the seeds, put burlap over the plots to keep the birds from eating them, and water the plants on a system.

I planted what my guards Ali and Khaliq liked to call foreigner seeds: different varieties of lettuces such as red salad bowl, mesclun, simpson, waldmann’s dark, and gourmet European salad mix. Greens included kale, Swiss chard, mustard greens, spinach, and my favorite, collard greens. Ali and Khaliq rounded out the garden by planting tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, green onions, and carrots. The garden was OUR garden. We all cared for it and prepared food from it. For me, the garden became a little bit of normal in a not so normal environment. It became a healing and community space for myself and expatriate friends and colleagues, and a refuge and safe space for the Afghan women and girls who wrote about and shared their lives through poems, essays and stories.

Fast forward to 2014. Still living and working in Afghanistan, and having fallen in love with growing food, the Security Advisor of the NGO that I was working for told me about the CASFS program and urged me to apply. So I went online, read about the program, and applied. The rest is history.

CASFS has been a life changing experience. It gave me the technical and theoretical foundation in organic gardening and farming that I can build upon. I have a new tribe of gardeners and farmers, mentors and advisors whom I can turn to when I need guidance. It also provided a beautiful, tranquil grounding space for myself and expatriate friends and colleagues, and a refuge and safe space for the Afghan women and girls who wrote about and shared their lives through poems, essays and stories.

Going forward, I hope to eventually put down roots in South Carolina and farm on family land. I never would have thought this possible without my participation in the CASFS apprenticeship. As I embark on this new adventure, I’d like to thank all the site managers, CASFS staff, and my fellow apprentices for their love and support.

What’s in the box?

- Lettuce, Flash, Troutback, Vulcan, or Leopard
- Radicchio, Leonardo
- Spinach, Tyee
- Kale, Lacinato
- Beets, Chioggia or Red
- Broccoli, Imperial

- Cabbage, Farao
- Potatoes, Yukon Gold
- Onions, Yellow
- Winter Squash, Butternut
- Shallots, Conservor
- Popcorn, Tom Thumb
- Persimmon, Hachiya

Due to reduced staff at the UCSC Farm, there will be no Thanksgiving box this year.

Kirstin Yogg Comerchero, Hay Barn and Quarry Field Production Manager, will be offering a Market Cart produce stand on campus at the Bay Tree Bookstore Quarry on Wednesdays from 2:30-5:30 pm beginning this week until our produce runs out.

2015 CSA End-of-Season Survey

Help us improve your CSA experience at the CASFS UCSC Farm! Please take a few minutes and go to the online Survey Monkey link below to answer 10 questions regarding your experience as a CSA shareholder. We would like to compile your feedback by Friday, November 20.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PRK57BL

Upcoming Event

Free Docent-Led Tour
Sunday, November 1 – 2 to 3:30 pm
UCSC Farm & Garden

Take a free, guided tour of one of Santa Cruz’s most beautiful locations – the 30-acre organic farm at UCSC. Guided tours are offered the first Sunday of the month from 2 - 3:30 pm. Free public parking available. For more information or to schedule a guided group tour, email casfs@ucsc.edu or call 831.459-3240.

Directions: http://casfs.ucsc.edu/about/directions.html
Baked Radicchio with Mozzarella Pasta

2 T unsalted butter (1/4 stick)
2 medium garlic cloves, minced
1 medium white onion, small dice (about 1 cup)
7 medium Roma tomatoes (about 2 pounds), cored and coarsely chopped
3 heads radicchio (about 4 cups), ends trimmed and sliced crosswise into 1/2-inch strips
1/2 C heavy cream
1 pound penne rigate or ziti pasta
8 ounces fresh mozzarella, small dice (about 1 1/2 cups)
1/2 C finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Heat the oven to 400°F and arrange a rack in the upper third. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat.

Melt butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. When it foams, add garlic and onion, season well with salt, and cook until onion is translucent, about 4 minutes. Add tomatoes and let simmer until slightly reduced and thickened, about 10 minutes. Add radicchio and cream and cook until radicchio is wilted, about 5 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning as necessary.

Meanwhile, cook pasta in the salted water for about half the time recommended on the packaging and drain. (Do not rinse.) Set aside.

Once the sauce has finished simmering, combine it with the half-cooked pasta and mix until the pasta is evenly coated. Place the pasta mixture in a 13-by-9-inch baking dish and sprinkle the mozzarella and Parmigiano over top. Place in the oven and bake until the mixture is bubbling, the pasta is al dente, and the top is golden brown, about 20 minutes.

Note: To increase the bitter flavor, use more of the white ribs and core of the radicchio; for sweeter flavor, use mostly the purple parts. Substitute a 28-ounce can of high-quality diced tomatoes for fresh tomatoes. Sauce and pasta can be prepared up to 1 day ahead and refrigerated in separate containers. To assemble, heat oven, pick up recipe at step 4, and bake until it is heated through and golden brown.

Persimmon Cake with Cream Cheese Icing

3/4 C dried currants
1/4 C brandy or whiskey
2 C all-purpose flour
2 tsp. baking soda
1-1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
3/4 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
1-2/3 C granulated sugar
3/4 C (6 ounces) unsalted butter, melted
1-1/2 C persimmon purée

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Coat a 10-cup Bundt cake or tube pan with butter or nonstick cooking spray.

Make cake: In a small saucepan over medium heat, bring the currants and brandy or whiskey to a boil. Remove from the heat, cover, and let cool.

Into a large bowl, sift together flour, baking soda, cinnamon, salt, and nutmeg. Stir in sugar. In a medium bowl, mix together melted butter, persimmon purée, eggs, and vanilla.

Make a well in the center of flour mixture, add the persimmon mixture, and gently stir. Fold in currants, along with any unabsorbed liquid, and nuts. Mix just until everything is moistened; don’t overmix.

Scrape batter into prepared pan and bake until a toothpick inserted into the cake comes out clean, about 1 hour. Remove from oven and let cool completely. Once cool, invert the cake onto a serving plate.

Make icing: In a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat together cream cheese and 1 T butter on high speed until smooth. Beat in vanilla and lemon juice, then gradually add powdered sugar, beating on high speed until smooth. Add water; the icing should be pourable. If necessary, add 1 more tsp. water.

Spoon icing around the top of the cake, then tap the plate on a folded kitchen towel on the countertop to encourage the icing to run down the sides of the cake.

Note: Cake will keep for 4 days at room temperature. Substitute unsweetened applesauce or banana purée for the persimmon purée.