Notes from the Field:
Put Away that Hoe

“This is the time of year when a vegetable garden needs a frost. The gardener himself secretly wishes for a frost, though it isn’t quite cricket to come right out and say so. Openly he is expected to brag about the tomatoes he still has ripening. Actually, he has ripened just about enough tomatoes for this year. He is willing to call it quits and wait for May and radishes and tomato plants. By then he will be fed up with canned tomatoes, and he knows it; by then he would pay a dollar apiece for those greenish-orange tomatoes now on his vines. But right now he’ll settle for a cleanup job in the garden and a weekend without a hoe, a spray gun, or a duster in his hands.

That’s one of the best things about nature in a land of four seasons—frost comes and puts an end to the succulent growing things. No garden should endure, with all its dividends and demands, more than about six months a year. The other six months one should be allowed to rest and dream and yearn and get rid of the calluses. And think how . . . modern transportation [will bring] fresh garden produce from California and Texas and Florida. And think loftily how much better home-grown lettuce and beans and corn and tomatoes are than those thus miraculously transported. Six months, as it were, to appreciate.

Hail the frost! Hail the blackened vine! Let those who make green-tomato pickles have those green tomatoes! The corn stands sere and stripped, the beans are rustling in the wind, the death rattle in their dried pods. The squash have given up. The lettuce has all bolted. Put away the hoe, close the garden gate, and let it frost.”

—Hal Borland, in Twelve Moons of the Year
Greens and Bulgur Gratin
from Gourmet magazine

1/2 cup coarse bulgur wheat
2 pounds assorted greens such as kale, collard, escarole, spinach, Swiss chard, and/or mustard greens
6 large garlic cloves, minced
3 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan (about 1 oz.)
6 ounces chilled mozzarella, grated coarse

For topping
1/2 cup fine fresh bread crumbs
1 tablespoon olive oil

In a heatproof bowl pour enough boiling water over bulgur to cover by 1 inch. Cover bowl with a plate to trap steam and let stand 20 minutes. Drain bulgur in a large fine sieve, pressing out excess liquid, and transfer to a bowl.

Keeping each variety of green separate, tear greens into bite-size pieces, discarding stems. Still keeping greens separate, wash thoroughly by dunking in a sinkful of water and transfer to a colander to drain.

Put coarser greens (kale or collard) in a 4 1/2- to 5-quart kettle and steam in water clinging to leaves, covered, over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until wilted, about 4 minutes. Add delicate greens (escarole, spinach, Swiss chard, and/or mustard) to coarse greens and steam, covered, stirring occasionally, until just wilted, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain greens in colander, pressing out excess liquid.

In a large heavy skillet cook garlic in oil over moderate heat, stirring, until softened but not golden. Stir in greens and bulgur and season generously with salt and pepper. Stir in Parmesan and remove skillet from heat.

Preheat oven to 400°F. and lightly oil a 1 1/2-quart gratin dish or other shallow baking dish.

Spread half of greens mixture in dish and sprinkle evenly with mozzarella. Spread remaining greens mixture over mozzarella and smooth top with a rubber spatula. Gratin may be prepared up to this point 8 hours ahead and chilled, covered.

Make topping:
In a small bowl with a fork stir together bread crumbs and oil until crumbs are evenly moistened.

Sprinkle topping over greens mixture and bake in middle of oven 30 minutes, or until bubbling and top is browned lightly.