Notes from the Field:
Garlic Harvest

"The harvest heals. It gives a sense of that wealth that only a stack of garlic or a pile of firewood or manure can represent . . . ."

—Stanley Crawford, from "A Garlic Testament"

We’re harvesting the garlic this week. It was planted last October, the last vestige of 2003, and put out roots and did some growing in the dark of the year before the frigid winter set in. It was mulched thick and stayed well in the ground despite the bitter temperatures, and popped up perfectly in the spring, the pale green spears the first harbingers of better weather to come. We fertilized the plants twice a week until the end of May to encourage the greens to grow, then stopped to allow the plant to put its energy into the bulb. We left the mulch on the ground to deter weeds. When the graceful scapes appeared on the plants in June, it was like a freebie, a crop that we didn’t plant but anticipated and used with delight.

Now, at the height of the season, we harvest the whole crop. The lower leaves have died back to become dry wrappers for the whole garlic bulb, and the cloves have separated within the bulb. We fork each row and pull the plants, grade them and set them aside. The process is punctuated by the smell of dark earth, the rich scent of decay as the mulch breaks down, and the unmistakable tang of garlic. We’ll take the garlic up to the barn and hang it for a few weeks while it dries down, then cut off the tops and bring the harvest back to you.

If you can resist using it all the first month with the season’s tomatoes and peppers, you can open a bulb in December and smell the fragrance of a year’s growth in sun and rain, the summer’s heat, the energy and vitality of the harvest, the tranquility of the drying down time in the dim barn. It’s all in there. Whether we like it or not, eating is a political act—and also an aesthetic and spiritual one. As with every crop that we put on the distribution table or in your share boxes, your garlic is filled not only with the exceptional nutritional qualities of fresh, organically grown produce, but also with the powerful positive energy of the hands that nurtured, cultivated, and brought the harvest in. That quality is something that only locally grown produce can provide—an intimacy with your chosen home place that extends beyond your day-to-day contact with it. Eating produce from the farm is taking your home landscape in, physically. It is sharing in the labor of the people who produced it, in the health of the soil, the diversity of the habitat on the farm, the preservation of one small piece of land that feeds hundreds of people every week. It is participating in a form of ecological preservation and social justice that cuts across the political arguments of the day and allows you to do something, physically, to connect with your community.

While the Democratic National Convention influences us all to one degree or another this week, we’ll be out in the fields, harvesting garlic. Although our farm sometimes feels like a sanctuary from the rush and turmoil of our modern world, a little anachronistic haven, I would argue that we are not separate from the world, but deeply, richly, earthily entwined with it. Our farm is not a look back to an idyllic past, but a look forward, a way to reconnect with our land and our community and take part in some of the oldest and most authentic processes we know. The garlic harvest is indeed, as Stanley Crawford put it so eloquently, a form of wealth that we’ve almost forgotten how to quantify—but our hearts and souls know when those accounts are balanced. We invite you to anticipate the garlic we harvest this week in health and joy.

—The Farm Crew: Amanda, Meryl, and Ryan, with many dedicated volunteers
Cooking Your Veggies
by Oakes Plimpton

An interesting article in the Harvard Magazine (www.harvard-magazine.com) entitled “The Way We Eat Now” has a section entitled Darwinian Dietetics which posits that a key event in the evolution of humans may have occurred over a million years ago when (according to anthropologist Richard Wrangham) our ancestors “invented” fire and started cooking their foods.

Wrangham investigated every known present society from the Pygmies to the Aborigines and discovered that every single one cooks its food. The only exception is modern raw food faddists and the raw food groups he studied in Germany were chronically underweight. Of the invention of cooking he writes, “Cooking enabled these animals—“Homo Erectus”—to acquire their food more efficiently and to get more of it, principally because it was softer [and easier to digest].”

He compares humans with apes. Apes have to eat their raw food six hours a day to stay healthy. They have much larger and more powerfully muscled jaws, bigger teeth, and a stomach and intestinal system that are a third larger than ours.

For us humans, eating raw swiss chard or kale would not be easy. According to the article, meat is especially difficult to eat raw (steak tartar possibly excepted). So next time you cook a carrot, don’t feel guilty! (The rest of the article is depressing—all about the spread of fast food eating habits and the toll it is taking on U.S. and world health.)

Gretta recommends:
Chocolate Zucchini Rum Coffee Cake

1 1/2 sticks butter at room temperature
2 cups sugar
3 large eggs
2 1/2 cups flour
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa
1 1/2 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt
1 tsp cinnamon
1/4 cup milk
1/3 cup rum
3 cups shredded zucchini
1 cup chocolate chips
1/2 cup chopped pecans

In large bowl, beat sugar and butter until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time. Add flour, cocoa, soda, salt, cinnamon, milk and rum. Beat until well mixed. Add zucchini, chocolate and nuts, again mixing well.

Pour into sprayed bundt pan. Bake in 350 degree oven, 50–55 minutes.