



# Stone Soup

Stearns Farm CSA • Community Supported Agriculture  
862 Edmands Road, Framingham, MA 01701 - [www.stearnsfarmcsa.org](http://www.stearnsfarmcsa.org)  
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Photo by Alyssa Mattei

## THE HUMBLE ART OF FARMING

By Kathy Huckins

The weather this season has compromised the growing potential of many of our favorite crops. Some crops like tomatoes and zucchini were threatened by bacterial and fungal diseases that didn't allow them to produce their usual large quantities. Other crops like winter squash and pumpkins received too much rain during their fruiting time, causing them to rot when ripe. They were grown at the Parkland, on soil that received less light and contained more moisture than other areas. Yet, many of our crops loved the moisture. Take the cucumbers for instance, and the cantaloupe and watermelons. They were heavy producers.

Of my 10 years at Stearns, this has been the most challenging weather I have experienced. At least during a dry year, we can water. But a wet year..... We put in the same amount of labor and loving care whether a crop is exceptional or minimal. So it is distressing to us to have to compost so much of our hard work. And it is disturbing to us not to have the quantities of crops we have had in previous years. Sure, we are used to a few below average growing crops each year, but this year it has been pronounced.

### ON THE STAND THIS WEEK

ON THE STAND: Head lettuce, salad greens, spinach, bok choy, celery, leeks, onions, parsnips, peppers, some tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and winter squash.

PYO: Braising greens of collards, kale and chard; some cherry tomatoes and tomatillos; culinary and tea herbs; a bouquet of flowers.

Thank goodness for diversity. In any given year, we can offer our sharers a wide variety of produce all season long. The quantities might shift, but we are assured of quality and ample food to take home and feed our families. It is true this year as well. The difference is that usually we have more overabundance in a few crops like tomatoes. This year we don't. Though, to date each sharer has received 25 pounds of tomatoes. That's sizable, but not what we are used to having.

The (CSA) Community Supported Agriculture model is based on customers sharing the risks as well as the abundance of all the produce grown. This year we have been at risk. That could mean that you, as sharers, might not get a particular vegetable or as much of it as you wanted. Yet, there is plenty of food for all of us. We just need to be flexible and creative as we take home vegetables newer to our way of cooking. For instance, right now we have lots of winter squash that have the beginnings of rot. It needs to be eaten soon. There is a lot of extras on the PUT AND TAKE table. This is your chance to put them by and have lots of squash-based meals this winter instead of tomato sauce.

Sometimes we as farmers think that we are in control of our farming. With the right methods and timing, our crops will grow and prosper. This year is a wake up call to that notion. Our job is to work WITH nature, not control it. We are in a partnership, not a dictatorship. It is a humbling experience. ☺

### FARM CONTACT INFORMATION

| Contact         | Position          | Email/phone                               |
|-----------------|-------------------|---|
| Stearns Farm    | Main phone        | contact@stearnsfarmcsa.org 508-371-4310   |
| Kathy Huckins   | Farm Manager      | huckins@charter.net 508-561-3950          |
| Janet Carlson   | Administration    | janet@stearnsfarmcsa.org 508-309-7777     |
| Gudrun Baubock  | Volunteer Coord.  | gudrunbaubock@gmail.com 508-620-9127      |
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Stearns Farm CSA is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

## GARDEN SHOWCASE: BEETS

By Donna Savastio



The modest beet boasts many, many health benefits. Beets are high in potassium and fiber, yet low in calories. Their edible leaves contain protein, calcium, fiber, beta-carotene as well as vitamins A and C. Beets are also known for their natural healing powers, and there are many

people who use beet juice regularly to cleanse their blood and their livers.

Beets can be eaten raw, boiled, steamed, sauteed or roasted, which is my personal favorite. Roasting beets whole with their skins on seems to bring out their natural sweetness. After roasting, you can peel them and slice them into your recipes. They are wonderful tossed with a bit of butter or olive oil and salt, and also go splendidly with goat cheese in a salad (an amazing combination).

One thing to keep in mind is that they do stain or “bleed.” A helpful hint to help with that issue is to cut the greens off the beets, leaving about an inch of the stems intact. Wash and boil them whole and unpeeled. Once they soften from boiling, you can let them cool, cut off the stem and root ends, and rub off the skin. Now they are ready for slicing, chopping or grating with less mess from the bleeding. Don’t throw away the green tops—they can be used like any other leafy green but will shrink considerably when cooked. ☺

### BEET BRUSCHETTA

A recipe from yesterday’s Harvest Festival:

- 2 large or 4 small cooked, peeled beets
- 2 tablespoons minced shallots
- 1/3 cup unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1/3 cup chopped fresh mint
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons sugar
- ¾ cup crumbled goat cheese
- Chives (optional)

Whisk together minced shallots, rice vinegar, mint, olive oil, and sugar. Slice cooked beets into thin (¼”) discs and lay on toasted rounds of sliced French bread. Top with the dressing, salt and pepper, and crumbled goat cheese. Sprinkle with chopped chives.

## WINTER STORAGE FOR HERBS

By Patricia Wilber-Zucker

It’s getting close to the end of the harvest season for the herbs. Some herbs, like **Basil** and **Lemon Verbena**, will be gone with the first hint of frost. Others, such as **Rosemary** and **Chives**, can stay green until the first hard freeze. Right now, many of the herbs at Stearns culinary garden are still green and ready to be harvested. The question I hear frequently is what to do with all our herbs so they will last over the winter?

Below are two simple methods to preserve herbs:

1. **Drying**—Pick the herb, tie it up or put in a brown paper bag and hang it in a warm dry spot until dry. Alternatively, you can use a dehydrator and dry them for a day or so. Once dried, they can be stored in glass jars and used all winter. HINT: When storing dried herbs, store your glass jars in the freezer, the herbs will stay fresh longer.

2. **Freezing**—To freeze an herb, pick it and put on a cookie sheet (HINT: cut it to the size you would use it later). Put the cookie sheet with the herbs in the freezer for an about an hour (this is called flash freezing), put in plastic zip bags and store in the freezer.

For either method, be sure to label your jar or bag with the name of the herb and the date picked. This will make it easier to identify later when you want to use it. Like all plants, preserved herbs do have a shelf life. Once they lose their green color (usually 3 months dried and stored in a cupboard, and up to 1 year in the freezer), they no longer have the same flavor and potency and should be replaced. Many of us have bottles of herbs such as parsley and oregano that were bought in a store and have been sitting for a while. It’s time to compost those old tasteless herbs and refill those containers with fresh herbs grown locally that you have picked and tended all season. ☺

Recommended storage method:

#### *Dry*

Basil  
Lemon Verbena  
Marjoram  
Mint  
Oregano  
Parsley  
Sage  
Tarragon  
Thyme

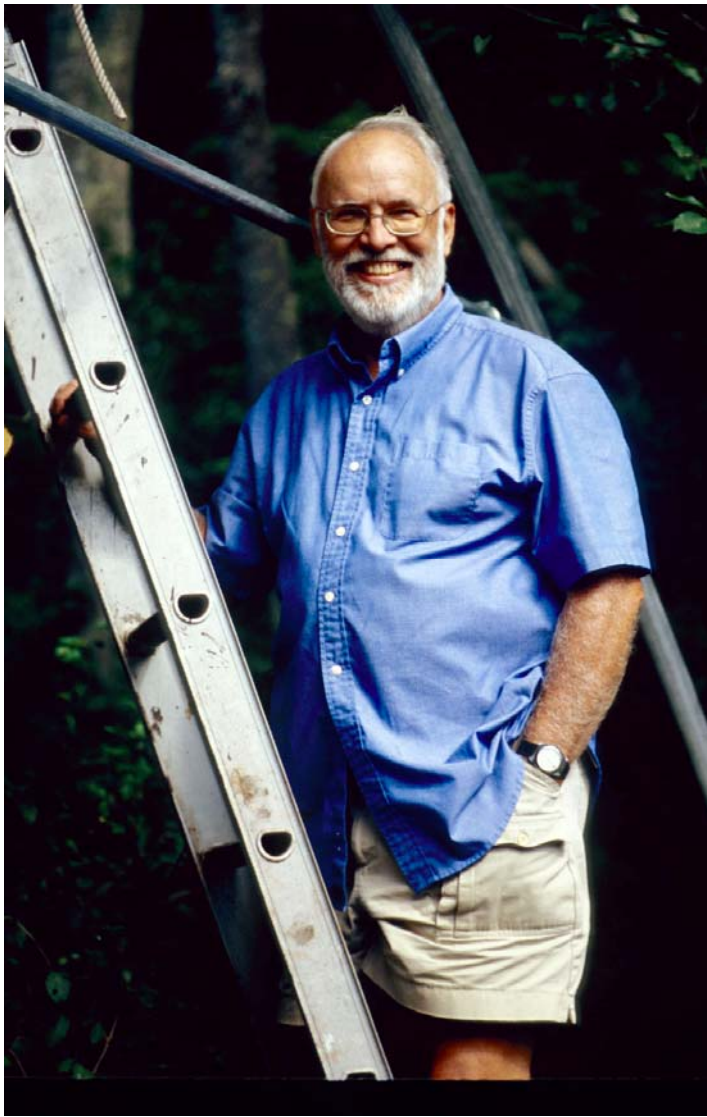
#### *Freeze*

Cilantro  
Chives  
Garlic Chives  
Lemongrass  
(will be harvested in October)  
Lovage (leaves only)

#### *Either*

Savory  
Rosemary





*Photo by Wayne Hall*

## THE HOUSE THAT BRIAN BUILT

By Nomi Sofer

When Brian Holland, a retired physicist, decided to teach an environmental science class at Bentley College, he hoped to get students interested in thinking creatively about environmental and energy issues. Instead, he found himself building a root cellar at Stearns Farm.

Although he grew up around vegetable gardens, and his grandfather had a small dairy farm, Brian wasn't particularly interested in organic and local farming until he started reading in preparation for teaching the course at Bentley. He was particularly struck by just how inefficient our food system is: it takes ten units of fossil fuel to produce one unit of food. Spurred on by his readings on the topic of sustainability, Brian and his wife Peggy became sharers at Stearns in 2007. Before long, he was building things that were needed all over the farm. So when our farm manager, Kathy Huckins, mentioned how much she would like to have a root cellar so she could offer winter shares, Brian volunteered to build one. "How hard could it be?" he thought.

Brian has been building things all his life. In Southern Kentucky, where he grew up, Brian built furniture, boats, and a workshop alongside his father. In graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, students were encouraged to make things in a well-equipped shop. Over time, Brian developed the feeling that he

could build anything. Indeed, he enjoys building so much that when he decided to install solar panels at his house in Framingham, he built a small barn on which to mount the panels, since the roof of the house didn't have any south-facing space. He says he wanted to save electricity and reduce his carbon footprint. One suspects that he also wanted an excuse to build a barn.

Historically, root cellars were dug into the ground underneath a house so that people could get into the cellar without having to go out in the cold and snow. But at Stearns we need a "walk-in cellar." So Brian and Kathy decided to build a structure that is only partially dug into the ground and to use a combination of water and fans to keep the humidity levels and temperature stable. As any New Englander knows, however, digging a hole of any size in our soil means contending with rocks. Big rocks. The first two spots Brian and Kathy identified as good locations for the root cellar turned out to be rock ledge. The third location, to the left of the pick-up tent, initially seemed more promising, but the ledge turned out to be buried just a little deeper. Since they had run out of possible locations, Brian rented a jack hammer, and with the help of Mark Kelly, Emre Tezduyar, and Brian Huckins—all dedicated to the idea of a root cellar—began to break up the rock ledge. It took twelve days of bone jarring labor and cost \$1000 in rental fees for the jackhammer, but by mid-February 2008, the job was done.

Brian spent the rest of the winter, spring, and summer building the root cellar. He had help: Mark Kelly enjoyed breaking rock so much he came back to help dig the footings, and Dan Webb helped lay the concrete block walls. Dave Moran helped with the roof. Brian Huckins, Mark Kelly, and Dan Webb helped move dirt up against the walls after they were finished. And Joe Trainor helped insulate the walls and ceiling. But the root cellar is truly the house that Brian built. 🌀



## WHY STEARNS?

By Sara Sullivan

I have been talking a lot this season about the benefits of eating delicious, local food grow in a healthy and conscious way. I suppose we all know that by now! What every sharer may *not* realize, however, is that we share these valuable benefits throughout the season with several worthy groups outside of our farm.

After each pickup on Tuesday and Friday, volunteers take our extra produce and donate it to locations where it is needed. Tuesday’s leftovers are picked up by Dave Borjhi, who brings them to the St. Bridget’s Food Pantry in Framingham. Friday’s leftovers are picked up on Saturday mornings by three of our dedicated sharers, Nicolette, Linda, and Beth, and delivered to Bridge House and Turning Point, transitional houses in Framingham. Even in a slower year, we have food to share, and it is right to give some of our outstanding produce to our community, to people who will use and appreciate it.

Dave reports that Stearns’ donations are always received enthusiastically. This year, St. Bridget’s food pantry received some of our ample cucumber harvest, and Dave said that even when lots and lots of extra

cucumbers were brought in, they were always snatched up in no time. “Everything goes” at the pantry, even items that are sometimes less popular with our own sharers, such as hot peppers. Last year, our farm donated \$10,000 worth of produce.

Community Supported Agriculture has the word “community” built right into its name, and the CSA farm model is founded upon the belief that sharing resources is the best way to enrich us all. By donating food to our community, we are applying that belief in a larger way. How wonderful that our decision to eat better and more healthfully helps others do so as well. **Why Stearns? To share food with those who need it.** 🌱

## MISSION STATEMENT

To preserve the historic Stearns farm as a sustainable all-natural garden, providing locally grown food in partnership between the land, the farmer, and the community.

- by using the CSA model
- by providing fair compensation, adequate working conditions, and support to the farmer
- by practicing good stewardship
- by donating excess food to the needy
- by encouraging the community to actively participate in the farming process
- by providing learning opportunities
- by fostering relationships between the CSA and the wider community and
- by providing a beautiful place that is nourishing to body and soul

### UPCOMING FARM EVENTS

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Tuesday, October 14  | Last pickup for Alternate 1 Tuesday Sharers                   |
| Friday, October 17   | Last pickup for Alternate 1 Friday Sharers                    |
| Saturday, October 18 | Garlic Planting   |
| Tuesday, October 21  | Last pickup for Full and Alternate 2 Tuesday Sharers          |
| Friday, October 24   | Last pickup for Full and Alternate 2 Friday Sharers           |
| Saturday, November 1 | Last Day for Sharers to complete or pay for work hours        |
| Friday, November 7   | Last Day for Winter Sharers to complete or pay for work hours |

## SWEET POTATO FACTS

Closely related to morning glories—you can see the resemblance in the flowers—sweet potatoes are often confused with yams, which come from an entirely different kind of plant. In U.S. markets, “yams” of any color are usually sweet potatoes. The simplest way to enjoy their natural sweetness is to **roast or bake them slowly in their skins, then split them open and brush the cut halves with butter or olive oil. Or replace up to half of the “regular” spuds in your favorite mashed potato recipe with sweet potatoes** to add color, nutrition, and flavor. The word potato is thought to be a variation of *batata*, used by native peoples of the Caribbean to mean “sweet potato” and later adopted in many languages to mean potatoes in general. So the sweet potato has prior claim to the word over the unrelated “white potato!” Sweet potatoes keep best at about 55–60 degrees. A cool cellar, if you have one, may be a better place to store sweet potatoes than the refrigerator.

### **SWEET POTATO OVEN FRIES.** Less fat, more nutrition and flavor. Adapted from [cooksillustrated.com](http://cooksillustrated.com).

Vegetable oil

2 lbs sweet potatoes (about 3 medium), scrubbed and peeled

salt and pepper to taste

Place oven racks in their middle positions and preheat oven to 400 degrees. Lightly brush 2 baking sheets with oil and place them in the oven. Cut each potato lengthwise into 8 wedges. Toss sweet potatoes in a large bowl with about 1 tablespoon of oil to coat. Season with salt and pepper and toss again. Using oven mitts, remove baking sheets from oven one at a time and arrange the sweet potatoes on them in a single layer. Return to oven and bake until potatoes turn golden brown underneath—about 15–20 minutes. Turn sweet potatoes with a spatula and bake again until browned on the other side—another 10–15 minutes. Transfer sweet potatoes to a platter and serve immediately.

### **MAPLE-ORANGE MASHED SWEET POTATOES.** A slightly unusual cooking method yields the best texture, with just the right amount of sweetness. Adapted from [cooksillustrated.com](http://cooksillustrated.com).

4 Tbs unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces

2 lbs sweet potatoes (about 3 medium), peeled

2 Tbs heavy cream

pinch black pepper

½ tsp salt

2 Tbs maple syrup

1 tsp sugar (optional)

½ tsp grated orange zest

Quarter sweet potatoes lengthwise, then cut crosswise into ¼-inch slices. Combine butter, cream, salt, sugar, and sweet potatoes in a large saucepan and cook, covered, over low heat, stirring occasionally, until potatoes fall apart when pierced with a fork—about 35–45 minutes. Remove from heat and mash by hand using a potato masher if you like a chunkier mash, or transfer to a food processor and process to a smooth purée. Stir in pepper, maple syrup, and orange zest. Serve immediately.

### **SWEET POTATO BUTTERMILK PIE.** Not your ordinary sweet potato pie. Adapted from *The Lee Bros. Southern Cookbook* by Matt and Ted Lee.

1½ lbs sweet potatoes (about 2 medium), peeled, diced

½ tsp kosher salt

4 Tbs unsalted butter, melted

2 large eggs, separated

2 Tbs lemon juice

½ cup sugar

½ tsp grated nutmeg

2 Tbs all-purpose flour

½ tsp ground cinnamon

¾ cup buttermilk

One 9-inch piecrust, pre-baked

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Using a pot with a steamer basket, add about 1½ inches of water and steam sweet potatoes over medium-high heat until tender—about 20 minutes. Drain sweet potatoes, place in large bowl, and cool to room temperature. Mash to a smooth purée with a potato masher or fork. You should have about 1¼ cups of purée (discard excess or use for another purpose). Add butter, lemon juice, nutmeg, cinnamon, and salt, stirring with a wooden spoon after each addition. In a separate bowl, beat egg yolks lightly. Add sugar and continue to beat with a whisk until yolks are a creamy lemon-yellow. Add yolk mixture to sweet potato mixture and stir with wooden spoon or rubber spatula until yolks are thoroughly incorporated. Add the flour a little at a time, stirring after each addition, until thoroughly incorporated. Add buttermilk and stir to incorporate. Clean whisk thoroughly, rinse and dry. In a clean bowl, whisk egg whites to soft peaks—about 1½ minutes (or use an electric mixer). Using a wooden spoon or rubber spatula, gently fold egg whites into sweet potato mixture until thoroughly combined. Pour mixture into prepared piecrust and bake on middle rack until center is firm and set—about 35–40 minutes. Remove from oven and cool completely on a rack. Serve at room temperature or cover with plastic wrap and chill before serving. A dollop of sweetened whipped cream and a light dusting of cinnamon or nutmeg won't hurt.

*If you have a favorite way of using Stearns Farm veggies, please share it. Send recipes, tips on storage or food preservation, or other suggestions to [sarah@cornmuffin.com](mailto:sarah@cornmuffin.com). Thanks.*