

What's With This Heat?!

We're in the middle of a very intense and extensive heat wave that just won't quit. I hope all of you are getting through this in good health. Once the temperature hits 100 we're in a whole new world of stress on the body and on the land.

So how does this heat affect the land? How are the crops handling the heat? What's the state of the farm?

1. The ideal high temperature for plant life processes is somewhere between 80 and 90 degrees. Once you get above 95, most plants will shut down in order to conserve moisture. Plants have many life-preserving skills, but they generally won't **grow** under harsh conditions. With all energy going towards survival, they also tend to stop flowering and fruiting, except as a final emergency measure to reproduce quickly. This is, of course, a general statement about the average crop plant, and does not apply to a whole host of plants that thrive under this heat, like a lot of our weeds.

2. Most crop seeds will not germinate above 95 degrees.

3. This heat puts a lot of pressure on soil moisture levels. Although winter and spring rains recharged moisture levels throughout the soil profile, the first two months of summer have been dry, leaving us a dry, dusty upper soil surface.

So... What does this mean? The good news, to start...

First, a lot of crops are just fine. We've had some great harvests from established, mature plants. Other crops, like sweet potatoes, leeks, celery, Brussels sprouts, carrots, beans, beets, etc., are well-established and should ride this heat wave out.

Second, a huge number of fall crops are safe near the greenhouse in seed flats. We have not yet planted out most of our fall crops, which allows us to keep them well-irrigated.

Third, this is a great time for a major heat wave. Most summer crops have had plenty of time in great weather to get established and productive. Unlike last year, when the heat waves struck as early as June, we've had wonderful production from the start.

On the other hand, a lot of "baby" crops out there (lettuce, late carrots, early spinach, salad mix, radishes, turnips) are struggling and/or shutting down. I'm watering them regularly in order to keep them alive, but they aren't growing much.

Also, our fall sowing and transplant season is delayed until the heat breaks. I simply cannot justify putting plants into these conditions just to stay on schedule.

And, it's very difficult to work in these conditions. We try to get the harvests in ASAP in the morning, but by mid-morning the heat index is often pushing 100, which basically kicks us out of the fields. We've been concentrating on as many "indoor" tasks as we can. The ultimate result is that we're getting behind on planting and weeding.

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What's in Your Share

Tomatoes, Peppers, Eggplant, Potatoes, Onion, Summer Squash, Cucumbers, Beets, Basil

Green Beans, Tomatilloes, Okra, Basil, Saucing Tomatoes and Cherry tomatoes are OPEN...

What's For Dinner:

Hot Peppers

We're harvesting several varieties of hot peppers. Those of you who are unfamiliar with the use of these drought-loving summer specialties should seek out the many ways of preparing and enjoying them.

The seeds and veins inside the pepper are the hottest part of the fruit and should be removed if you're looking for a milder flavor.

The easiest use of hot peppers is as added spice in any stir-fry, soup, or salad dressing. Simply chop up and add. Add to eggs and rice, too. Always test the amount to make sure you're not overdoing it.

I admit I'm not as familiar with hot peppers as with other crops so I invite (in fact, encourage) all you hot pepper lovers to bring ideas and recipes to share with others. I love your enthusiasm... it's contagious and will make us all pine for the rich spice of summer!

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The worst-case scenario is that we lose some crops. Luckily, we are a mixed-vegetable farm, with many crops out there providing harvests throughout the season. We can handle some crop losses, and we always do.

It's more likely that we'll experience a dip in the overall size of harvests sometime in the next month. This isn't as bad as it seems. It's a long season and we have lots of time to make up for dips.

Even more likely is that we may have some gaps in harvests. With the heat-related delay in planting, sowing, and weeding it is possible that we may have a couple weeks of low harvest levels before the fall crops kick in. Overall, we shouldn't see a drop in harvest levels as a whole, but don't be surprised if a couple weeks fall short of what we've gotten used to this year. This is a normal aspect of sustainable agriculture, and it's why CSA works so well... We're in this together, and together we can get through anything! And cooler temperatures will come again...