



It's not your ordinary greenhouse!

February 2010

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Annie's Gardens and Greens Newsletter

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Special points of interest:

- **February 12—Wine and Food Tasting at Annie's Green-Grocery—2 to 5 pm.**
- **Check out the March newsletter for more information on Vermicomposting.**

The Hype of Local Grown Foods

January 20, 21 and 22, I spent in Eau Claire, WI at the Midwest Value Added Agriculture Conference sitting in on sessions about locally grown foods. I listened to many people who are running sustainable farms, and it is exciting to see what they can do. There was also much talk about farm-to-school and getting locally grown food to our youth through the hot lunch programs. There are the food safety issues and how farmers are to handle produce, the certifications that farmers may have to go through to guarantee their food is safe, but is the public willing to pay for the cost of all of the certifications that will be passed on to the cost of their food?

Haiti has seen a natural disaster that is unspeakable. There are no words, no actions that can ever explain what they are going through. Haiti is a country that relies on having all of their food shipped in from

other countries, and why? We live in the United States and we have the land and the capabilities of building local food systems within our communities to make us more sustainable. Why do we rely on other countries for food? Because we can. Because we are spoiled and want to be able to eat strawberries during the winter months even if it means eating berries that have been sprayed down with pesticides and gassed to produce a large, juicy, crimson red berry that catches our eye in the produce section and tempts our taste buds for only \$2.49/lb in a pint size container.

As our government addresses the health insurance issue, maybe we should be taking preventative measures to insure our good health by eating healthier foods that are native to us. Food grown here within a



"Why do we rely on other countries for food?"

days drive has more nutrients in it than that which came from 1500 miles or more. Every day that vegetable or fruit sits, it loses nutritional value.

I too get tired of the same frozen and canned vegetables and cannot wait for the fresh. But I do know that I appreciate it and savor the flavor that much more.

The other part of that is I know exactly what type of seed I planted, how I grew it, nurtured it, and harvested it. That is something I can take pride in.

Local food is not hype, it is "our" way of life. Shouldn't you make it part of yours?

2010 HERB OF THE YEAR: DILL; PART 2

Dill has been cultivated since at least 400 B.C. It originated in Eastern Europe like a wild weed and is widespread in the Mediterranean basin and in West Asia.

The name dill comes from an old Norse word *dilla* or *dylle* meaning to soothe or lull. The plant has carminative properties of relieving gas.

Just the presence of dill to the Greeks, was an indication of prosperity.

Charles the Great used it at banquets to relieve the hiccups and in the Middle Ages it was used as a love potion and was believed to keep witches away. However, this is folklore.

Medicinally, dill has been used as a tea to sooth the stomach and as an anti-gas remedy. It is said that it increases mother's milk



Dill has carminative properties of relieving gas.

and helps treat breast congestion from nursing, as well as a good remedy for colic in babies. Dill water can be made by adding 8 drops of dill oil to 1 pint of water. Take up to 8 teaspoons per day. This is to help relieve the symptoms I just spoke about. To make a tea, infuse two teaspoons of dill seed in one cup of water for 10 to 15 minutes, then strain. Take 1 to 2 cups per day. Note that you are to seek a physicians advice before using any home remedy.

Who Started Valentine's Day?... Continued

Another legend tells how Valentine sent the first 'Valentine' greeting to himself while he was in prison. It was believed that while he was in prison he fell in love with a young girl, who may have been the jailor's daughter. It is alleged that he wrote her a letter and he signed it, "From your Valentine". This expression is used still to this day.

By the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France. So, it is undecided as to whether

or not it was celebrated to commemorate the anniversary of his death, or if the Christian church decided to celebrate it in order to 'Christianize' the celebration of the pagan Lupercalia festival. In ancient Rome, February was the official beginning of spring and was considered a time for purification.

Around the seventeenth century, Valentine's Day began to gain popularity and the celebration of the day began to lead to the exchange of small tokens of hand-

"From your Valentine". This expression is used still to this day.



written notes. Today those handwritten notes have been replaced by sending millions of cards. 85% of which are purchased by women.

And now you know.

Happy Valentines, and happy spring cleaning!



increased nutrient levels and it breaks down the soil in to plant available form.

Watch for March's newsletter as we explore this form of composting further.

Vermicomposting

Looking to increase the production of your plants? You may want to try vermicomposting. If you are not familiar with this term, you are probably wondering what I am talking about. It is the castings of worms composted. Similar to plain composting, except that you use worms in addition to microbes and bacteria to turn organic waste into a

nutrient-rich fertilizer. You can use two species of worms: Red Wigglers (*Eisenia foetida*) or Red Earthworms (*Lumbricus rubellus*), which are rarely found in soil and are adapted to the special conditions in rotting vegetation, compost or manure piles.

The benefits of using worm castings are

Celebrate Valentines with a Wine & Food Tasting

Annie's GreenGrocery will be celebrating Valentine's Day with a wine and food tasting February 12 from 2 to 5 pm. Winneshiek Wildberry Winery of Decorah, IA will have a variety of wines to choose from. We will also have cheese from Mitzva Farms and brats from Iowa Supreme Meats.

Winneshiek Wildberry Winery was

started by Ken and Yvonne Bar-

nes in 2004. They have 25 artisan wines to choose from, which we will be sampling some of these.

Just for Valentine's Day, Annie's GreenGrocery will feature soap products from Iowa Naturals of Davenport, IA and candles from



Soyphisticated from Mason City, IA. Stop in and shop for your "Valentine"!



Growing Local Food During the Winter in Iowa

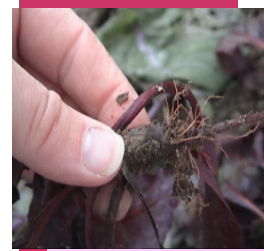
2008 was our first winter for seeing local food being raised all winter long. Plant peddler of Cresco, IA grew all sorts of vegetables, along with raspberries and strawberries. It was an experiment for them. It was awesome eating fresh, picked raspberries in the middle of January. And the freshness of the lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, and summer squash was mouth watering. However, they are a commercial grower for flowers, so growing vegetables beside the flowers doesn't always work. Adjustments were made and this winter they are focusing only on tomatoes, cucumbers, and leaf lettuce.

These products are being sold in our Annie's GreenGrocery, as well as other grocery stores and markets in Iowa, year round. Many people are so out of touch with our growing seasons, that they do not realize that the potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips, squash, and apples that

are available, are from the 2009 fall harvest. Because stores can carry fresh produce all of the time, people assume these are grown constantly and you can harvest them at any time throughout the year.

Annie's has been running it's own experiment with growing vegetables throughout the winter months. We have found that growing vegetables in pots in a greenhouse, the produce had a thinner cell wall thus allowing the vegetables to ripen quicker and their shelf life is shorter.

Vegetables grown in the cold frame and in the ground had a stronger cell wall, thus producing a longer shelf life and a nicer product. There is, however, the problem of heat. There is none. We left the cold frame unattended for about 4 to 6 weeks, during December and January.



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Who Started Valentine's Day?

Do you ever wonder who starts all of these holidays? It had to be Hallmark, right? I mean, they seem to benefit from most of these holidays.

Valentine's Day is celebrated throughout the world and the origin of St. Valentine is still a mystery.

There was a St. Valentine who was a priest in 269 A.D.. He was martyred in 270 A.D. because he would not give up his faith and buried in the Flaminian Way. He is the Patron Saint of affianced couples, bee keepers, engaged couples, epi-



lepsy, fainting, greetings, happy marriages, love, lovers, plague, travelers, and young people. St. Valentine is represented in pictures with birds and roses.

In fact, the Catholic Church has three Valentines who were all martyred, which makes it hard to know which one the holiday was started after.

There is one legend that tells of how the priest Valentine served during the third century in Rome, during the reign Emperor Claudius II. The Emperor had decided that single men made much better soldiers than men with wives and



families, which led to the Emperor outlawing marriage for young men.

Valentine realized the injustice of this order and continued to marry couples in secret. Eventually, Valentine was found out for what he was doing and ordered to be put to death.

Romantic, huh?

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