

Published March 27th, 2013

Grow Your Own Gourmet Veggies

By Sophie Braccini



2012 plant sale at the Moraga Gardens Farm Photo Provided

All the plants offered for sale are grown in the garden's greenhouses; the members are organized in teams of transplanters, water crew, and venting, and take turns caring for the tender plants as they emerge in the flats and are transfer in their individual pots.

In the greenhouses, the temperature is kept at around 80 degrees by opening and closing vents. The Moraga farm is known to local restaurants and markets for its wide range of tomatoes. "The San Marzano is the best tomato for making paste and sauce," notes Preston. "Our selection of cherry tomatoes includes two different reds, a bluish red/yellow, a yellow and a green variety."

Claire Curtin bought cherry tomatoes there last year. "I planted the tomatoes in a pot on the sunny deck at my Walnut Creek office," she says. "As the tomatoes became ripe I would harvest and leave them on the desks of my co-workers who loved to have a small tomato snack during the day." She says she will add herbs to her selection this year.

As for Herpolsheimer, she is partial to the Brandywine. "This is the hardiest variety producing well late into the season.... I was still making salsa from the green ones that ripened indoors in December!" she says.

Twenty different types of tomatoes of all sizes, colors and tastes will be offered, including rare heirlooms.

If you want to make your own ratatouille from your garden, take a look at the eggplants and peppers. "Our eggplants were chosen to provide a choice of plants that do well in Lamorinda and are used for different cooking needs," says Preston. "For example, the Black Beauty and Rotunda Bianca are great for casseroles and eggplant parmesan, the Ping Ting and the Japanese Long are perfect for stir fry."

The peppers will be ordered by heat index, from the sweetest, like the Green California Wonder all the way to the knock-your-socks-off Thai, and many in between. This year the farm will include culinary herbs and catnip - as a kitty treat. Sales tables will not only have pictures of the vegetables but suggestions for use and recipes. Growing instructions will also be provided, such as spacing the plants, pruning, watering and 'hardening' the plants so they transfer well from the warm greenhouses to your garden.

Moraga Gardens Farm is located at 1370 Moraga Way, between the Moraga Fire Station and School Street. The sale will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. March 30, and continue on Saturdays and Sundays from April 6-21 at the same time. For more information, visit www.Moragagardensfarm.com.

Last year Rhiannon Herpolsheimer, a Lafayette acupuncturist and amateur gardener, bought all her tomato plants at the Moraga Gardens Farm, but this year, she will have to wait a few additional weeks to get her favorite heirlooms.

Plant sales at local community gardens are perfect for those who are looking for organic plants adapted to the local soil and weather. But buying local can be a problem when weather is challenging-the Moraga Gardens Farm had to postpone its annual sale by a few weeks until March 30. To compensate for the tardiness, new varieties of vegetables and herbs have been added, all tried and approved by those who work the garden.

"Our plant sale will be slightly later this spring than in past years, primarily because of the unusually cold weather we've experienced recently," says Gardens member Bobbie Preston. "By patiently awaiting our plants, though, there are always huge rewards for the buyer in that we not only offer a diverse selection, but we've chosen them precisely because they do well in the Lamorinda area." Over 3,200 organic plants grown without the use of chemicals and pesticides will be offered.

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