



The Pierce Farmstead

Botanical Gardens, Jungle Adventure Park & Country Vineyard
Crop Report, Field Update, Almanac & Monthly Chronicle

*** May 2016 ***

MAY IN CENTRAL FLORIDA is the end of Spring weather, though the official season continues until late in June. Still, sometime in May cool evenings and mornings start to disappear and be replaced by the heat and humidity of the Florida summer that will be in full force by the start of June. In my experience, May is time to pick the more tender vegetables and instead start thinking about those particular items that can survive or thrive in the Florida summer.

In Season In Central Florida In May

There is a trend to buy local, more nutritious, tastier fruits and vegetables and to celebrate their harvest season at home and by finding restaurants that buy local. In May in Central Florida here's some of what's ripe and ready.

BLUEBERRIES: The many U-Pick Blueberry operations are up and running. The season is generally April and May with some variation depending on the weather that year. Also the ones in the grocery stores and restaurants should be local if you look for them.

GARDEN VEGETABLES: Most above-ground garden vegetables like lettuce, cabbage, tomatoes, cucumbers, squashes are too tender for Florida winters or summers and are best grown in mid-Feb. to May and Sept. to Dec.. All of these are good harvest in May if you've still got them growing. Buy the locally grown ones at the store or farmer's market in May you can.

7 To Ponder As Summer Approaches



Generally the wet, hot and humid summers in Florida are a better time for bugs and diseases in the Florida garden than for produce. A few things, though, don't mind it if you plan a bit.

1. Cacti & Dragonfruit – Cacti come alive in the Florida summer, and make their fruit by summer's end. Do you need to give yours any attention before they get growing again, or even plant a few?

(Cont'd below.)

The May Farmstead Editorial: On Clones, Hybrids & Heirlooms

By John "JD" Pierce

Hybrids, clones, heirlooms—it's all a bit confusing. In fact it's about impossible to understand what you're eating these days unless you look back for a moment.

Historically, of course, food was grown by planting seeds obtained from fruits and vegetables grown naturally. While an oversimplification, basically plants would flower, be pollinated, produce a seed with genes from the "mother" and "father" plants, and that seed would be planted to obtain a new plant that resembled the old plant in many ways, but its genes were its own.

It was the same in that it was still an onion or an orange, even a particular variety with its own taste, but it was also different, unique, distinct.

As far back as Genesis, farming has been well known as hard work. Diseases, bugs, or weather can destroy a whole season's work. Over time, anything that would protect the crops from these problems could only be a good thing. Two methods of protecting plants and increasing productivity have been known about for ages.

Let's say you have an orange tree that grows the sweetest oranges around, and a lot of them. However, the seeds from those oranges don't produce trees that are as good. They just aren't as sweet, there are less fruit on them, and they just don't do as well.

However, if you take one of those less impressive seeds and plant it, you can let it grow a bit and then splice growth from the good tree onto it in a way that keeps it alive and well. So the bottom of the trunk is from the new seed, and the part from the slice up is the good tree. Not from the good tree, the top, growing part IS the good tree. It makes the nice, sweet oranges and is not slowed down at all.

Congratulations, you have just cloned a tree. This is not new knowledge as far as plants go, it's old. And, if done well, an entire field can be filled with dozens of trees. In fact, a whole grove can be filled, genetically speaking, with the exact same tree.

The second method is to build the perfect plant from hybrids. Imagine a room with 100 tomato plants growing in it. One plant can fight off the disease late blight well, and 10 others other particular diseases. Still others produce well, or are less likely to split, or can handle drought. By taking the pollen from one to another, a seed can be produced that does something well, or even many things. If that seed later produces a seed, there are no guarantees. It was made to serve its purpose for one generation, and new seeds would need to be bought the next year.

Then, of course, there are heirlooms. An heirloom tomato is not a clone and it is not a hybrid. It is created naturally from regular pollenization. Because they were grown for so long, often within a particular area, heirlooms retain their own properties well. A Cherokee Purple tomato is still a tomato and generally changes little even though it is being reproduced naturally. On the other hand, it may be trickier to grow because it may be more subject to certain diseases or adverse weather. But, with an heirloom, unlike a clone or a hybrid, you can eat your tomato, save your seeds, plant them, and get something pretty much like what you ate. Also some of the things tomatoes are bred for, like shelf life, can take a priority over taste, which is not a problem with heirlooms.

Are clones and hybrids more disease resistant? Well, yes and no. They are certainly more likely to fight off some things heirlooms can't but ironically, people are finding that the fight for disease resistance is not so easy. Remember that field of orange trees that are really all the same cloned tree? If a disease figures out how to get at it, it can decimate a crop, as citrus greening is doing right now to Florida oranges.

I grow heirlooms and hybrids, because each has its advantages. My Cherokee Purple tomatoes will be excellent, but there will be fewer of them. Also, they are more likely to fail to disease than the hybrids next to them which I planted to make darn sure I get tomatoes.

FARMSTEAD RECIPE OF THE MONTH: TOMATO NUKED RADISHES

I don't like radishes on salad. I don't really eat them raw. Coated in a nice oil and thyme or rosemary and roasted for a good amount of time in the oven they are darn good (as are all root vegetables--try roasting them if you haven't).

But if you consider the effort, the best recipe may be the easiest one to prepare.

Take some radishes of any variety, slice them on a paper plate, pour on some sun-dried tomato dressing the to cover maybe half the surface of them. Cook them in the microwave until the dressing looks burned. Maybe 3-4 minutes.

They're very tasty for very little effort. Can't beat that.



7 To Ponder , cont'd.

2. Eggplants – While it is counter-intuitive from their fleshy mature, eggplants like the heat.

3. Sweet Potatoes – Sweet potatoes don't just like the heat, they love it. And you'll probably have them for the next season as well, even if you don't plant them again.

4. Okra -The Southern Classic. If you can stand going out to the garden every other day in the heat, the okra will keep producing well into the Florida summer.

5. Peanuts. Yes, peanuts. I'd have to learn a lot more than I know to plant them, but yes indeed.

6. Southern Peas (Cow Peas). I'm not a fan of these bean-like Southern Peas but if you are, they like the southern summers for certain.

7. Peppers (Chilies) – Bell and hot peppers will grow a bit then just sit and stare at you until it gets warm enough. If you're looking to have fresh chilies to eat or dry, now's the time to get them planted in the garden.

Hey, just what is this darn thing?

The May Pierce Farmstead Newsletter is the first of a series of 12 issues I (JD Pierce) will be issuing to remind myself and teach others what to consider each month when gardening in Central Florida. (No, there's not really a fun park at the Farmstead.)

The ideas presented are my own, and certainly not guarantees of anything other than that they are my opinion. Anyone is free to share this guide if they change nothing in it. My site can be found in its most active state on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/piercefarmstead>, on Twitter at [@PierceFarmstead](https://twitter.com/PierceFarmstead) and on the web at <https://piercefarmstead.wordpress.com/>.



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