

SOUTHERN FRIED GREEN TOMATOES

Adapted from butterbeready.com

4 medium green tomatoes, sliced half-inch thick	2 large eggs
1 c all-purpose flour	1/2 c whole buttermilk
1 c cornmeal	hot sauce, optional
1 tsp creole Creole Cajun seasoning	peanut oil, or any high smoke-point oil

1. Pat the tomato slices dry with a paper towel.
2. Add flour, cornmeal, and Creole Cajun seasoning to a shallow bowl. Whisk to combine. In a second shallow bowl, combine eggs, buttermilk, and optional hot sauce to combine. Set aside a baking sheet.
3. Working in batches, add the tomato slices into the egg mixture, coating well on all surfaces, then dip into the flour/cornmeal mixture. Set the dredged tomato slices onto the prepared baking sheet. Let tomatoes sit while heating the oil.
4. Pour oil into a large cast iron skillet over medium heat, until oil is 2 inches deep. Once oil is hot, working in batches, add the tomatoes to the oil and deep-fry until slices are golden brown, 3-4 minutes. Use slotted utensil to transfer fried green tomatoes to paper towel-lined plate. Serve with your favorite dipping sauce. Worcestershire is a farm favorite!

REFRIGERATOR CORN RELISH

Adapted from topsinlex.com	1 tsp cumin
8 c cooked sweetcorn kernels	1 tsp coriander seed
1 1/2 c bell pepper, diced	1 tsp crushed red pepper
1 c yellow onion, chopped	1/2 tsp celery seed
1/2 c poblano pepper, diced	2 tsp kosher salt
2 1/2 c white vinegar	1/2 tsp black pepper
1 1/4 sugar	1/4 c water
2 tsp mustard seed	2 Tbsp cornstarch

1. Toss corn, peppers, and onion in large bowl and set aside.
2. In large pot, combine vinegar, sugar, mustard seed, cumin, coriander, pepper flakes, celery seed, salt and pepper. Bring to boil over medium-high heat.
3. Add corn mixture and return to boil. Reduce heat to low. Simmer, uncovered, for 15 minutes, spooning off any foam.
4. Whisk water and cornstarch, then stir into corn mixture. Turn heat to medium and cook 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until mixture thickens.
5. Ladle into sterilized jars. Cover with lids and let cool to room temperature before refrigerating. Keeps up to 3 months.



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Leafy Greens: Store leafy greens in the fridge in a perforated plastic bag. If you chop and wash ahead of time, spin the leaves dry before putting back in the bag with a dry paper towel to absorb moisture. Refresh by plunging them in ice water 15-20 minutes.

Peppers: Wrap unwashed in a paper towel to absorb any moisture, and keep it in the veggie drawer of your refrigerator.

Fall Squash (delicata and spaghetti): Delicata is small and oblong with yellow and green coloring and delicate, edible skin. The flesh of spaghetti squash forms spaghetti-like strands when cooked. Spaghetti stores longer than delicata, but keep them all in a cool, dry, dark place around 50 degrees.

Onions: Candy onions are not yet dried, so for best storage, keep refrigerated. If you start to see green sprouting, onions are still good, just use soon. Green onions should always be refrigerated.

Sweet Corn: Plan to eat your corn soon after you receive it. As time elapses after harvest, the sugars turn into starches, and the corn loses its sweetness. To store, refrigerate sweet corn as soon as possible. Keep husks on.

The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

We often get asked at the market how our organic produce looks so good, when the plants in their garden either do not yield much fruit, or succumb to some unknown force of nature. There are countless numbers of factors that play into growing a healthy crop without the use of toxic chemicals, so here are a few principles to consider. The tricky part is that most of it happens underground, and it takes several seasons to build the system.

Soil is much more than a mixture of sand, silt and clay. Structurally these various sized and shaped particles are naturally jumbled together forming little air gaps where the bigger sand pieces rest against the smaller silt and clay pieces. Clays, and there are many kinds, are flat and can stick together, eliminating air gaps and potential for rainwater to penetrate. For an idea of what I mean, try to wet a magazine and see how long it takes to become completely soaked, and then how long it takes to dry out. So having a good mixture is important, and if you don't have one, there are ways to improve what you do have. These particles are not only structural building blocks, but each has a varying capacity to hold nutrients needed for plant growth, like phosphorus, calcium, etc. This is referred to as the natural fertility of the soil, and the Central Bluegrass region is blessed with great soils with high natural fertility. Unfortunately, yours could have gotten messed up when your home or sub-division was built, because often the less healthy sub-soils are shoved into the back yard when digging a basement or doing foundation work. If this has happened to you, all is not lost, it will just require a more diligent effort and more time to heal.

It is important that you never till or handle the soil when too wet. If you do, it has the effect of destroying the porous structure allowing air and water to penetrate, essentially making adobe bricks. Sometimes we wait for weeks until the conditions are right to work the soil to prepare for seeding, but it must be done to give the little seeds a chance with all those weed seeds lurking about.

The soil is much more than structural building blocks with some naturally occurring minerals hanging around. The Soil Food Web is where the farming begins. We are actually microbe farmers. Having a good mixture of the tens of thousands of species of bacteria and fungi that live in all those little nooks and crannies is the basis of life as we know it. As these microbes live, breathe, regenerate, and die, they release nutrients back into their tiny ecosystem. The bigger-but-still-microscopic creatures like flagellates and nematodes feed off of them, and subsequently release their nutrients back into the system. As this miniature jungle of the food chain becomes more active, the more nutrients there will be for the

plants to thrive. Plant roots are not passive sponges absorbing whatever they bump into. Specific fungi actually dissolve the minerals attached to the soil particles and deliver them into the plant root in a symbiotic relationship.

When you introduce plant roots, they naturally push and wind their way through the small channels to secure the plant to the ground. Each season when the plant dies back, the dried up roots have effectively made new channels for air and water to go deeper into the soil, nourishing the soil food web.

So if you do not have this healthy condition, there are several things you can do. You can incorporate compost or other decayed plant material into the top few inches of soil when the conditions are right. Compost is an inoculant of bacteria and fungi to invigorate the soil food web. The more diverse the plant material in the compost, the more species you will introduce. For example, a pile of chemically fertilized and treated grass clippings will not benefit you as much as a mixture of decayed leaves, clean clippings, old weeds, vegetable trimmings, etc. Mixing with the soil may also help form little pockets for air and water to be held for later use. It is entirely possible to achieve the same success with no tillage whatsoever. A thick layer of mulch that slowly decays will release the microbes into the soil over time. Other larger soil organisms and earthworms will move into this environment and begin the healing process. With this system, you can plant small transplants directly into the ground with very little disruption to the soil and scrunch the mulch back around the base of the plant.

Now the above-the-ground-part of farming starts. Make a habitat for beneficial insects to thrive, like having rows or sections with flowering plants like sunflowers, or buckwheat, or flower beds with great diversity of plant material. The mulch will be great for beetles and spiders that eat insect eggs and larvae and the like. Uniform watering is a key component of success. Trickle irrigation systems are best as the water goes directly into the soil, without wetting the leaves (wet leaves allow airborne fungi to set up camp on your plants). Select varieties that are known to be resistant to some of these plant pathogens as well. We recommend that one-third of your available space be planted to legumes like clover, to allow for rotation of plants in new location each year, breaking the insect and disease cycles.

So, when you ask us why your plants are not productive or pretty, there are too many factors for use to come to any conclusion. What we have seen is that at Elmwood Stock Farm, the longer we employ the numerous philosophies associated with organic farming, the prettier and more productive our produce gets. -Mac