



# Farm Notes

## CSA Newsletter

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## Wrapping Up the Season

by Hana Newcomb

The years are starting to add up to a serious number. We are finishing our 24th CSA season, and some of you have been with us for the entire time. It is astounding to think of how many bunches of kale you have eaten, how many sweet potatoes you have roasted, and how many salads you have prepared with these vegetables. We thank all of you for your commitment to cooking!

At the beginning of the pandemic, when none of us really knew what to expect or how to keep ourselves safe, we shifted the whole CSA process outdoors in Vienna. We never went back to the small, crowded air-conditioned rooms. Now our displays are much more like the farmers markets, with piles of beets and carrots next to bags of arugula and stacks of curly kale sitting out in the open, in the shade. We love hearing our

CSA members talking through their choices and agonizing over their last selection. We love listening to your discoveries, and your cooking stories.

So much has stayed the same in 24 years. But every year we find more ways to tweak our systems and make things easier for all of us. A little while ago, I made a list of all the improvements that we made in 2023. To non-farmers, these might not seem so interesting. We refined our processes, more than anything else. We bought a few more pieces of equipment. We built a new cooler. We found ways to shorten our workday, even during the busiest parts of the season. All of these changes were paid for with CSA dollars, and we are thankful.

We are thankful that new folks keep finding us, even though we are not particularly good at advertising. Now that there is a huge wall between our stand and



photo courtesy of hana newcomb

The road construction chaos finally yielded a good result when a long time CSA Customer rode her bike three miles from her house on the new trails. It's unprecedented and exciting.

the highway, blocking the view, it amazes us that anyone can find us. It's mostly word-of-mouth and Google.

I also made a list of which crops grew well, and which ones were disappointing. It was an unusually good onion year. We rarely have

enough onions to get all the way to November, and this year they stored beautifully. It was a frustrating garlic year. The seed was flawed and it grew only tiny bulbs. Tasty, but way too small. The tomatoes

*continued on page 3*

# Living in PodLand

by Oscar HC

On April 20th, I slept in my pod, an off-grid, unfinished, perfect for six months bedroom, for the first time. The carpenter bee in the corner nibbled her way through a 2x4 while I dreamt of walking through the forest. Lots of critters made their presence known. Once I discovered there were two rat snakes hanging out inside: when I picked up the watering can, it was weighty but then no water trickled out. No big deal, just a reptile curled up being cozy. The second snake was in the pot with the plant I tried to water. My nervous system needed some serious soothing after that!

Staying in a pod reminded me a lot of the sleep away camps I enjoyed as a child. No street lamps or school buses, yet plenty of wild animal sounds and a sky full of twinkling stars. The communal kitchen also conjured camp vibes, and that's really where I got to

know the three other folks staying in Pod Land. John and Laur with their nourishing oatmeal ritual and their virtual trivia game, Sheep, modeled respect and ambition on the daily. Brandon was realizable for a wise word if/when we would occasionally cross paths. There were a handful of times all four of us would be in the kitchen simultaneously, and someone would exclaim "we're all here!"

Six months after my first night, on Halloween, I slept in the pod for the final time. I'd become the last resident of PodLand after Brandon left for Tennessee or wherever the winds blew him; Laur and John had left the week before for New Zealand and their hiking adventure. The average nightly temperature on the farm had crept lower and lower over the previous two weeks, and I'd been incredibly grateful for my sleeping bag. Waking up with cold bones ain't easy. The next afternoon, on the first of November, I



photo courtesy of oscar hc

brought some bedding and other important belongings to the Tiny House my brilliant and generous friend Ciara built and offered to me for cozy winter housing. The light through the windows and the warmth in the sleeping nook are gifts I'll cherish for the next few months before I relocate to another nest.



photo courtesy of oscar hc



photo courtesy of laurebone



photo courtesy of oscar hc

(1) The front of Oscar's pod on Friday, October 13th. (2) Laur, a PodLand resident, beside a pony of tomatoes. (3) Two of the PodLand residents this year, Oscar and John, holding bowls of nuts before the final Summer Series event in August, which was all about tree nuts. (4) Brandon, one of the PodLand residents, investigates the paw paw tree.

continued from page 1

were outstanding, and we picked our last one just before the frost. Squash was really good. Winter squash was record-breaking in its health and vigor, with almost zero rotting. Potato yields were okay. Beans were mostly a disaster. Sweet potatoes were completely wonderful in every way. Spring carrots were bad, fall carrots are excellent. Spring beets were not great, fall beets were gorgeous. Kale is a workhorse of a crop,

dependable and hearty, and no one pays much attention to kale anymore. Spring lettuce was incredible, with some heads so big that they filled a shopping bag all by themselves. Peppers came late, as usual, and they were glorious. Our fields of fall brassicas are going strong, still full of cabbage and choy and spicy arugula and so much kale.

All in all, it was a very good growing year, despite the long dry spell. We know, from long experience, that we cannot take

full credit for our success as growers. So much depends on the weather. But we feel satisfied that we are learning to make the most of every opportunity, doing so much better with using our coolers to store vegetables correctly so they stay in good condition, and growing really good varieties. Even after six decades of farming, we keep on learning. Farming is eternally challenging and completely absorbing.

Thank you for helping us to keep on learning to be better farmers.



photo courtesy of hana newcomb

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photo courtesy of helen roades

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photo courtesy of hana newcomb

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photo courtesy of helen roades

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(1) Thursday potluck. (2) Hana flexes in front of a fully loaded van that she loaded herself. (3) The best pigs ever. (4) Doing our best to take out tomato stakes.

# Winter Reading Lists

The unread books gather dust during the daylight-filled hours. As the darkness takes more time, farmers find quiet moments to return to their novels, manuals, comics, etc. Here are two reading lists, the book-stack photo from Ciara and the other from Maggie.

- Finish *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende
- Finish *Winterwood* by Shea Ernshaw
- *Dear Senthuram* by Akwaeke Emezi
- *Life Isn't Binary* by Meg-John Barker and Alex Iantaffi
- Reread *The Raven Cycle* books (and read sequel series) and other books by Maggie Stiefvater
- *Solitaire* by Alice Oseman
- *Will They or Won't They* by Ava Wilder
- *Love and Other Disasters* by Anita Kelly
- *The Inheritance Trilogy* by N.K. Jemisin
- *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston
- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

And many, many more...

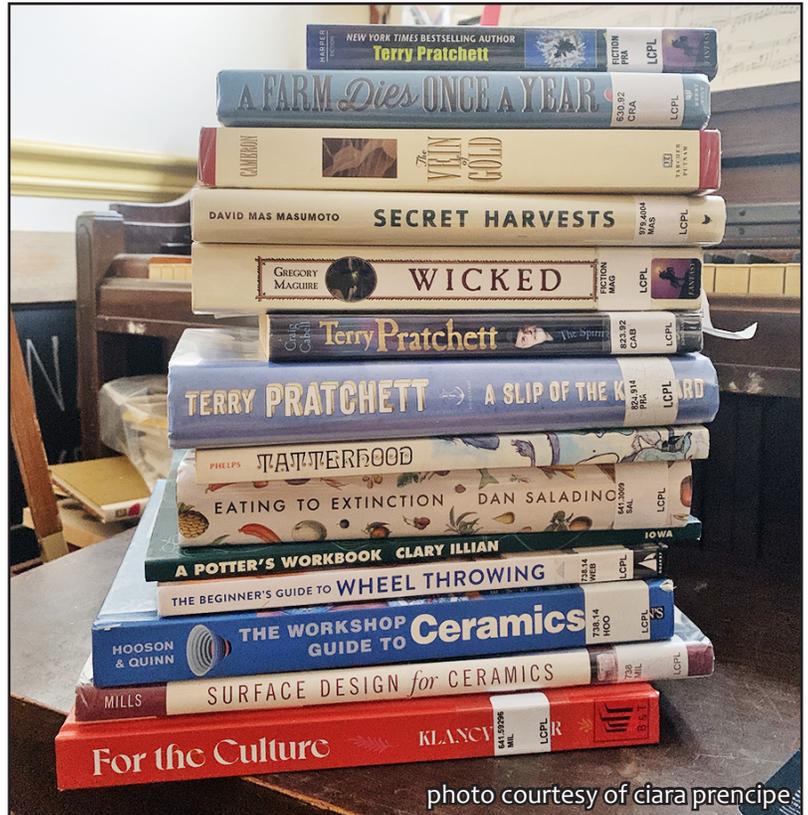
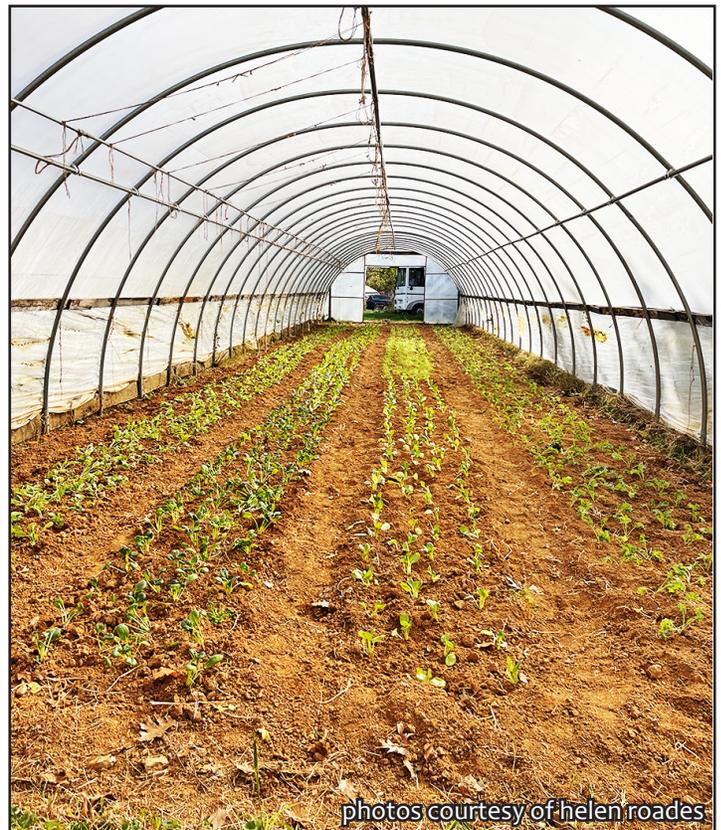


photo courtesy of ciara prencipe



photos courtesy of helen roades

Before and After: a tunnel transformation by Rachel + Helen.