

News from the Ridge

July 20, 2004



Hey Sam, maybe you'd sleep better if you counted garlic instead of sheep.

Field Report

- by Christine Qualls

Garlic for Breakfast?

I have garlic on the brain. I eat it with every lunch and dinner. I toss it on to mashed potatoes, spread roasted garlic on French bread, add crushed raw garlic to pasta, and add it chopped and sautéed to chard. Raw, crushed garlic is great in salad dressings and in gazpacho. In the garden, we are very busy harvesting, cleaning, and curing the garlic. I think I am beginning to sweat garlic.

I have read up on garlic and its lore in *The Herbal Epicure* by Carole Ottesen. Carole tells us that garlic has been used since ancient times. It was stored in King Tut's tomb for journey into the next life along with gold and oil. It was garlic that fortified Ulysses against Circe. It is also considered an aphrodisiac, which may explain why King Tut wanted it for his next life.

Garlic has very powerful medicinal values. The Russians used it in World War II as an antibiotic for wounded soldiers. Garlic has killed cancer cells in test tubes and lowered cholesterol. Ottesen's book cites studies that show garlic helps pregnant women, improves circulation, lowers blood pressure, inhibits cancer-causing agents from binding to human breast cells, and it is useful in the treatment of allergies. So, how much garlic do we need to eat to get these benefits? Ottesen's book says one to four cloves of fresh garlic a day. The jury is still out, however, as to whether garlic needs to be raw to be beneficial. Some folks say that it is best to crush the garlic clove with the side of a knife before chopping it to release more of the beneficial compounds.

We grow two types of stiff neck garlic here: Music and Spanish Roja. The Spanish Roja has a beautiful red wrapping around the individual cloves. The bulbs are smaller, and the plants are trickier to grow, but the flavor is superior to the Music variety. Music is almost pure white garlic with some red streaking. The plants are very dependable and grow huge bulbs. It also has a wonderful flavor and stores well into the winter.

Eat up and live long healthy lives!

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSNAKESSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS

- by Fiona Harrison

In my experience, the mere mention of the word "snake" brings one of two responses. It either makes one's skin crawl or elicits a smile of warmth and affection; there really is no in-between. I don't know anyone who is indifferent to snakes. If we can replace misconceptions with facts and our fear with curiosity, we can begin to appreciate their important roles in our environment.

Snakes are reptiles and belong to the same group of animals as lizards, turtles and crocodiles but they differ from other reptiles by having no legs, eyelids or ears. All snakes are pure carnivores; not a single species eats plants. They have dry skin that they shed periodically and cannot generate their own body heat. That's why they have to sit in the sun for long periods to warm up. Over most of North America, snakes emerge from hibernation in April and remain active until falling autumn temperatures force them to find a spot to hibernate.

It wasn't until I was talking with a friend recently that I realized that a lot of people don't know that snakes can lay eggs AND give live birth. Not the same snake of course. Of the 30 species of snakes in Virginia, only three are venomous. These three species, as well as eleven others, give birth to as few as 2 and as many as 63 live young. The remaining 16 species lay eggs, some laying up to 104 eggs at one time.

continued on page 2

Recipe for the week

Roasted Garlic Grits

- 1 bulb of garlic
- 1-teaspoon olive oil
- 2 cups water
- 2 cups broth (*veggie, beef or chicken*)
- 1-cup instant grits
- 1/2-teaspoon salt (*not necessary if you are using canned broth*)

Set the head of garlic on a square of aluminum foil, drizzle it with the olive oil and wrap the foil around it. Roast for 25 minutes at 350 degrees. Allow cooling.

Squeeze the garlic pulp into a saucepan. Add the water and stock. With the back of a spoon, mix the garlic into the water and stock. Heat to boiling and add the instant grits and salt to the boiling liquid. Cook about 5 minutes.

SEARCHING FOR THAT PERFECT SHEEP - by Sam Brown

We've all spent at least a few nights lying awake, wishing we could doze for a few blissful minutes, and most of us have tried at least once, probably as a child, to ease our troubled minds by counting sheep. And with a child's curiosity, many of us, as we counted those sheep, have found the following questions float through our minds as we eventually began to drift off, "Are these sheep resistant to parasites? Will they have troubled, multiple births? Do they reach market weight quickly on pasture and produce a full, meaty carcass? Will I have to shear them? Will their wool be soft and easy to card and spin?" And maybe, even at that early age, we began to suspect that the answers to these questions depend entirely on the breed of the individual sheep.

The majority of farmers start with their first breed for one of two reasons: advice from a trusted breeder or farmer, or because a certain breed was available locally. When we began to expand our flock at the Blue Ridge Center, we tried a little of each.

We started last year with two ewes of primarily Finn stock because a local farmer and friend had them available. Ewes of most breeds give birth to twins, with some ewes producing a single lamb or, more rarely, triplets. Finns have been known to produce triplets and even quadruplets on a regular basis, with at least one known to have given birth to octuplets. It is difficult for a mother to produce the milk necessary for three babies and almost impossible for any more than that. So the farmer is left to feed and tend the runts, which invariably costs a lot in both time and money. One of our own lambs (a triplet) was bottle-fed for this very reason.

Not wanting to duplicate this experience each year, we began searching for other breeds to raise. We've looked into buying Clun Forest, met some very nice Karakuls, and heard wonderful things about the Romneys. The wool from Merino lambs is so soft, we considered them as well. But when Andy mentioned he had previously worked with Dorsets, and after hearing the raves about the meat from this breed, we purchased two Dorset ewes. We are very excited because one of these ewes is pregnant and due in the next month or so.

On the advice from Susan Schoenian, a local breeder, we also purchased four Katahdin wethers (castrated males) to raise for meat. If they do well, we may raise a few ewes next year. Many people love them because Katahdins are hair sheep, meaning they shed their coats so you never have to shear them. But I feel their most important quality is a resistance to internal parasites. This means you don't need to use chemical dewormers; your sheep are healthy and the meat is healthy as well. Even with our other breeds we prefer not to use these chemicals, so instead of regularly deworming all of our sheep, we follow a practice developed in New Zealand of checking the color under the lower eyelid. The most dangerous worm is a blood-sucker that can quickly produce anemia in the sheep; this changes the color under the eye from a healthy red to pale pink or even white. We only use a dewormer if the sheep really needs it.

It's not unusual for one farm to raise more than a single breed, and that may be where we end up. It is a real pleasure to see the woolly sheep out in the winter, very content to forage and stroll through the grass and snow. But when spring and summer arrive, the Katahdins (did I mention hair sheep come from the Caribbean) really thrive.

LAMB

We will have lamb available for sale by the cut in a few weeks so prepare room in your freezer. Much like eggs from pasture-raised hens, lamb raised on grass is superior to what you will find in the store. Pasture-raised lamb is not nearly as fatty as conventional grain-fed lamb. It is also extremely high in beneficial Omega 3 fatty acids and, like all grass-fed meat, is high in Vitamin E and beta-carotene. Please see www.eatwild.com/nutrition.html for more details about the health benefits of pasture-raised meat.

Please note we have a few frozen broiler chickens still available. They are slightly heavier than anticipated, averaging around six to six and a half pounds, and sell for \$2.50 per pound. Feel free to call or just stop by if you are interested in purchasing one.



The perfect sheep? New kathaadin lambs at our farm.

SNAKES...continued

A few of us recently ran across a black snake nest here on the property. She was buried deep in a pile of earth, surrounded by her eggs. The warmth and protection that a mulch pile or compost pile can provide make these prime locations for a snake nest. Because snakes are such beautiful creatures and for the most part harmless, it's best to enjoy their presence and leave them alone. They are important parts of the food chain and play an invaluable role in controlling many pests. For that reason alone, I enjoy their presence and will go out of my way to protect them.

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Fundraising Update

- by Christine Qualls

Thank you everyone for supporting Andy's goal of raising money for the Breast Cancer 3-Day walk. He is more than half way to meeting the minimum goal of \$2,000! Of course, the minimum is never enough for Andy. He and his teammate, Brian, have set a team goal of raising \$10,000! You can fill out a donation form online at <http://www.the3day.org> and type in "Andrew Pressman". Thanks!