



September 18, 2013 —

Farmer Brains

Wouldn't it be interesting to do brain scans of farmers and see if there are any similarities between them? Or even better, wouldn't it be neat to study the brains of beginning farmers and see how they change throughout the process of becoming a seasoned grower? We have some (completely unsubstantiated) predictions about what these brain scans would find.

First, they would show that farmers exercise their brains' ability to change over time. Scientists used to think that brains developed throughout childhood and stopped changing after people reached maturity. Luckily they were wrong on this one. In fact our brains have neuroplasticity—they grow and develop new neural pathways as we expose ourselves to ideas and experiences. Since no two seasons or crops are alike, farming is a constant process of learning. Every year presents a new set of problems to solve, new techniques to try in the field and new people to work with.

For instance, Frank at Green Cedar Farm appreciates that he gets to know new farm interns each year, and Manuel at the Dawn Gardens has been fine tuning the fertility levels of the soil so the aphids don't go crazy on the broccoli. Cody at Grassfed Gardens has

gained an appreciation this year for the value of thoroughly investigating a new farm site before breaking ground, and Susan at Harmony Acres has learned that her chickens are big fans of the Jerusalem crickets she digs out of her potato beds. This is real world learning, and it's how new connections are formed between the neurons of our farmers' brains.

The flipside is that our brains can also form neural pathway ruts when we think and do the same thing over and over, which happens plenty often in farming (like picking snap beans!). There are probably really well-worn pathways in farmers brains for each task of the growing season. Maybe that's why we keep coming back for more each year, because farming is a familiar habit, a well worn pattern in our grey matter.

We'd like to think that the day to day movement of farming would deliver some of the benefits that meditation has on the brain. Studies have found that people who meditate gain emotional stability and have improved responses to stress. Meditation can even make parts of the brain thicker in areas associated with memory, self-awareness and compassion. On a good day the quite, introspective routine of farm tasks can approach a sort of meditative state, where mental chatter fades away as the plants and soil are tended to.

And the beauty of the farm might also stimulate farmers' brains in certain ways. Studies about the neural basis for art appreciation have found that beauty lights up the brain's medial orbital frontal cortex, part of our reward and pleasure center. So every time we see a gorgeous row of carrot tops or a harvest morning glistening with dew there's a part of our brain that rewards us for that experience. Just like eating chocolate or being attracted to a mate, the pleasure of seeing vibrant, growing plants gives us a happiness-inducing shot of dopamine and keeps us coming back for more. At least that's our theory.

Full Share:

- Potatoes
- Green Peppers
- Jalapenos
- Cherry Tomatoes
- Carrots
- Mesclun Mix
- Summer Squash
- Spring Mix
- Lemon Cucumbers
- Winter Squash
- Snap Beans

Half Share:

- Potatoes
- Slicer Tomatoes
- Pears
- Spring Mix
- Summer Squash

What Grow Where:

DAWN GARDENS

summer squash, cherry tomatoes, slicer tomatoes, peppers, winter squash, potatoes, pears

GRASSFED GARDENS

snap beans, mesclun mix, summer squash

SIERRA VALLEY FARMS

spring mix, carrots

GREENVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

cucumbers, bell peppers, jalapenos

HARMONY ACRES

potatoes

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Bread Share Flavor

Cheesy Mushroom

Pasta Share Flavor

Whole Wheat Fettuccine

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Roasted Kabocha Squash with an Orange Honey Glaze

We bet this recipe would work with any kind of winter squash.

INGREDIENTS

1 Kabocha squash, cut in half, seeded, and sliced into
1-inch thick slices
2-3 teaspoons olive oil for brushing squash

Glaze:

2 teaspoons olive oil
1 shallot, diced
3 tablespoons honey

2 tablespoons water
2 teaspoons lime juice
1/4 teaspoon rice wine vinegar
2 tablespoons orange juice
2 teaspoons orange zest
2 teaspoons fresh minced ginger
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
salt, to taste



DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Line a baking pan with tinfoil (for easy clean up). Brush the flesh of the squash with olive oil, and roast flesh side down for 30-35 minutes, or until tender. In a small skillet over medium heat, add 2 teaspoons olive oil. Add shallots and sauté until lightly golden, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. In a small bowl, combine remaining ingredients EXCEPT sunflower seeds. Whisk until smooth. Just before you're ready to serve the squash, add the sauce to the pan of sautéed shallots. Heat on medium until the sauce begins to bubble and becomes lightly syrupy, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat and drizzle over the cooked squash. Sprinkle with sunflower seeds. Serve immediately.

Source: foodblogga.blogspot.com

CRISPY CHIPOTLE POTATO TIAN

Have you guys ever heard of potato tian? This is a new one on us, but it looks delicious *and* beautiful!

Ingredients

2 lbs. potatoes, thinly sliced (1/8 of an inch is good-- using a mandoline slicer or food processor is best)
1-2 tsp. minced or pureed chipotle in adobo sauce (1 tsp. is fairly mild, so adjust according to your own taste)
3 tbsp. olive oil
salt to taste



Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Whisk together chipotle and olive oil. Brush the bottom and sides of a small baking dish with 1/3 of the oil mixture.
3. Place potatoes standing up in baking dish. You want them to be as tightly packed as possible. Brush tops of potatoes with remaining oil mixture and salt to taste.
4. Bake for 75-90 minutes or until tops of potatoes are browned and crispy.

Notes: It's important to pack the potatoes into your baking dish as tightly as possible. To make sure you're using the right size, before you slice the potatoes, place them in your baking dish to get an idea of how they'll fit. Try using an 11 1/2-inch oval baking dish.

Source: ohmyveggies.com

Visit our **Facebook** page for this tasty link:

ROASTED WINTER SQUASH WITH WILD RICE STUFFING

www.Facebook.com/HighAltitudeHarvest

Crop Updates

American and Indian Valleys had their first hints of frost this week. Yikes! A couple of our farmers reported a slight tinge of frost burn on their plants Sunday and Monday night. The feel of fall is definitely in the air, but here's hoping that the tomatoes and beans hold out a couple more weeks!

Potatoes

We've got taters coming from two of our growers this week. Harmony Acres is a seasoned potato producer for us, and uses mainly raised beds to grow the crop, cutting down on heartbreaking gopher damage. This is the Dawn Gardens' first year growing taters for HAH, though they've done them in the past for other markets. For all of the pest threats that potatoes endure and the digging they require, we think they shouldn't have such a humble image. Potatoes are veggie royalty!

Winter Squash

The Dawn Gardens provided with some beautiful Red Kuri (orange/red) and Kabocha (green) winter squash this week. Full Shares will get one or the other, each of which can be baked, added to soups, cooked and added to baked goods (pancakes!), in a Thai curry dish... the possibilities are endless!