

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

Despite the dire warnings about possible severe weather this past Saturday, the sun played peek-a-boo with the clouds for most of the morning, before taking over completely and ushering in the hot, muggy air. We're not complaining, as that encouraged people to visit the Market. Shoppers were not disappointed as we now have the earliest strawberries, along with various types of lettuce and greens and young garlic. Hothouse tomatoes and cucumbers continue to be available as well.

By next Saturday, more produce will be ready and more farmers will have strawberries.

Long time vendors at the Aurora Farmers' Market, Shirley and George Wiedemeyer of Nature's Rainbow, are coming to the end of their season. I've asked them to tell us about the other items they have in addition to tomatoes available, and why you might be interested in planting them.

Did you know that you could help our planet by planting sunflowers? They are easy to grow and are drought resistant. They attract pollinators and can be used to extract toxins from the soil. In fact, they were planted at Chernobyl and Fukushima to extract radioactive elements from the ground water. Nature's Rainbow has sunflower seeds as well as other seeds to attract pollinators to your garden.

Nature's Rainbow also has nasturtium seeds and plants for sale. Edible flowers have become a popular trend in both home kitchens and upscale restaurants as they make a beautifully colourful and tasty addition to salads. They can be used with cream cheese with a flavor similar to watercress. Their seeds can be pickled as a replacement for capers.

The Wiedemeyers carry a wide range of culinary herbs.

For example, basil is very popular in the kitchen and there are many varieties. Try the large, fragrant leaves of Genovese Basil for tomato and pasta dishes or to make pesto. Try using Lemon Basil with fish or chicken dishes. These are but two of a large variety of basil plants which can play a tasty role in your kitchen.

For something different, try using borage's star shaped flowers in a summer drink. The plant is a favourite with bees. Or try using Salad Burnet in your salad. Its leaves taste like cucumber.

Nature's Rainbow carries a large number of organically grown heirloom hot pepper plants. The Aurora Hot Pepper is a beautiful small plant ideal for containers. It has lovely purple, orange and finally, red fruit and can be brought inside in the winter to replant outside in the spring.

Craig's Grande Jalapeno is a large, flavourful pepper great for salsas. The Tabasco pepper is the famous heirloom pepper used to make Tabasco sauce. It can become a house plant in the fall. Fatali is a sizzling hot pepper from Central Africa which produces three-inch long fruit with great flavor and few seeds. Lucifer's Dream is a Caribbean variety of hot habanero pepper with many small red peppers with a hot fruity flavor and aroma. The Trinidad Scorpion is now recognized as the hottest pepper on the planet by the Chili Institute in New Mexico.

It is extremely important that the genetic variety that Nature has provided through the millennia be preserved to maintain diversity in our food plants.

During the 1840s, the Irish potato famine led to the death or displacement of 2.5 million people. That is what can result when farmers rely on growing just a few species of plants. Shirley and George encourage you to introduce a new heirloom to your garden and kitchen this summer. Visit them at the south end of Wells St. until the end of June.

Our next Special Event is Strawberry Fest on June 25 when the Aurora Community Band will perform at the bandshell.

In addition, there will be free strawberries, products with strawberries, crafts for the children and a draw for a Market bag. It's one of our most popular events so include a stop at the Farmers' Market in your plans for June 25.

See you at the Market!