

Quacking From Rappahannock

April 2011

Harvesting Honey On A Small Scale

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Upcoming Classes & Workshops

- April: Week-end of April 8, Spring Wellness Retreat at [Belle Meade](#) Farm & B&B in the F.T. Valley of Rappahannock County (Sperryville). Organized by Cheryl Mirabella of [Living Whole Health](#). Yoga, hiking, rest, relaxation, herbal instruction & culinary instruction (the latter by me). One room remaining at the Inn (as of 3/26) - Day rate available for Saturday activities only (no lodging). Information and registration at [LivingWholeHealth.com](#).
- May: Sunday May 1, 3:30-7:30 PM, Washington, VA – Cooking Class: 4-course seasonal menu inspired by Normandie. [Un Dimanche a La Campagne/ Sunday in the Country](#)
- Summer: Check our workshop page on the [website](#) for additional cooking classes (generally the first Sunday of the month) and canning & jam making workshops starting in early July **through October. If you are interested, it's not too early to register**—several students have done so already! Topics include: Jam, tomatoes, peaches, pickles, apples, pears etc

As Sweet As Honey

Harvesting honey is becoming one of our spring rituals—along with planting peas and potatoes and foraging for morels. A few weeks ago, we harvested the first honey of the year - a bitter sweet harvest as it was left by a colony that died off this past winter.

We went into winter with two colonies. Only one survived. The other succumbed not because of disease or **lack of food (i.e. honey) but because it was not "queen right"**. The queen either died (*it happens*) or she flew away with some of the bees to create another colony — **we saw a swarm in late September although we aren't sure if it was our colony**. But whatever happened, she did not leave a replacement queen.

A colony must have a queen, or it loses its purpose. Bees can form a colony without a hive box (in a hollow tree for example), but not without a queen. As the queen imprints the colony with her pheromones, she is **in effect "Home"**. Besides, she is the only one laying eggs: everybody else is a female worker bee (yes, they are a few drones—male bees— during the warm season but they get kicked out at the onset of cold weather). Bees work hard at protecting their queen too: they mass around her in cold weather, slowly rotating from the inside to the outside of the mass to keep the queen warm and alive. Keith did not see any massing. So without a purpose, without eggs to nurture into new bees, the left-behind bees died off. They did not disappear as in **"colony collapse disorder"**: their little bodies were there. A lot of uneaten honey remained too. So we took it.

Harvesting honey is not difficult and is done easily enough by hand on a small scale — but it is methodical work. We started late morning and had all the honey jarred by late afternoon - 13 quarts, or a little over 25 pounds. But not all that time was spent actively, some was waiting for the honey to run through the sieves.

Those are the steps we follow:

1. Move the super from the hive - gingerly. We use **medium size frames, 10 to a "super" (a box without bottom not top)** - around 40 pounds per super when the frames are filled. For long term storage,



A frame, with full capped honey cells



Uncapping the honey cell by hand



A frame, with emptied honey cells. Hexagons are the most efficient use of space



the bees cap the honey in the perfectly hexagonal cells with wax.

2. One at a time, remove the frames from the super. Use a cap scratcher tool (sort of like a fork with lots of needle-like prongs) to pierce the caps of the honey cells so the honey can flow. Do it inside a very large bowl to catch the honey-sticky wax caps. (Later those are squeezed hard to extract a little more honey.)
3. Lower the frame in the honey extractor (it looks like a giant salad spinner). We have a small 2-frame extractor. Spin! Spin some more! The centrifuge force of the spin throws the honey against the walls of the extractor where it runs down to the bottom. Flip the frames so the other side now faces the wall. Spin more. Repeat with the other frames. This spinning is actually a bit of work, you may break into a fine sweat!
4. After all the honey has been extracted, sit the extractor in the sun for a couple of hours (careful to seal all openings because of insects and bees intent on robbing). The gentle heat from the sun liquefies the honey enough so it pours easily. Or if you rather not wait, use a bowl scraper or sturdy spatula to push the honey on the wall down.
5. Set a big bowl under the extractor tap, open carefully, and let the honey flow. At that point it is mixed with bits of wax and here and there a bee or bee part.
6. Pour the honey through a series of sieves, with a finer and finer mesh, to remove debris and wax particles, and finally into jars.

We do not sell our honey, it's for our own consumption, so we do not pasteurize it. I look forward to eating it -

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HONEY - (Continued from page 3)

so perfect on the breakfast table with freshly made bread and artisanal butter - and cooking with it throughout the year. And I look forward to our next harvest in a few months.

Keith has plans to divide the remaining colony. If they get too big, they will run out of room in the hive, they will swarm and leave. We much rather keep all our bees!

Bees are fascinating creatures—and this brief article cannot even start to give any real details about their biology, their behaviors and habits, how honey is made and the troubles bees are encountering -- from diseases and parasites to the spraying of pesticides, the latter made much worse with neo-nicotinoid pesticides.

If you are interested in learning more, I recommend the following books:

- Robbing the Bees: A Biography of Honey by Holley Bishop
- Fruitless Fall: The Collapse of the Honey Bee and the Coming Agricultural Crisis by Rowan Jacobsen



The Kitchen Garden: Sorrel



There are indubitable signs of spring out there despite the chilly weather.

For once, the garden is awash in the bright yellows of forsythias and daffodils, and the pale greenish yellow of spice bush blossoms is lightening our woodland. But for the ever hopeful kitchen gardener, a much surer sign that spring is coming is **what's budding, swelling, germinating, pushing up or otherwise showing signs of life in the vegetable garden:** peas, lettuce, fava beans, radishes, mustard, beets etc are all germinating.

But it will be a while before they are of harvestable size. Meanwhile is there something fresh I can sink my teeth in - or at least wake up my taste buds with? Something green? With a little bite? **Something... live? Oh sure they are** a number of greens that grow happily enough in a cold frame throughout winter and they are

still providing a fresh taste at this time of the year: mache, spinach, cutting celery, parsley, arugula, and sorrel are among them. They do not need a cold frame per se, but the protection provided by a cold frame allows them to send forth new leaves much earlier than their unprotected brethren,

left totally outside in what is otherwise a generally still bleak garden at this time of the year.

Sorrel might be less well known **on the list, so let's talk about it,** a little, shall we?

Sorrel (the botanical name of the genus is *Rumex*) is a vast family of 200 or so species. Many people are familiar with [Sheep Sorrel](#) aka *Rumex acetosella* that grows like a weed and that many consider a weed indeed: it grows rampantly via energetic land-crazy stolons that refuse to **relinquish the soil they've colonized.** **But it's edible all right, with a taste that's tartly pleasant, even** if the collecting of its small leaves is quite a job.

[Garden Sorrel](#) or Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) is however something that I cherish in my garden because of its hardiness, its earliness, its bright tart taste and because it is a perennial

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vegetable—and they aren't that many of them in our climate, aren't there? It may be bought at nurseries that sell herbs or edible crops, either labeled as an herb or a salad green. It is also very simple to grow from seed, as the seeds do not require any special treatment or attention. It also self-seed easily – without being invasive. All the sorrel in my garden is grown from seed.

Start at anytime between now and May. The sooner you start, **the earlier you'll have leaves to eat.** Just sprinkle a few seeds on top of the soil. Water. Germination occurs in 2 to 3 weeks in warmish conditions. If you starting indoor, make sure to provide lots of light as soon as the seeds have germinated.

Sorrel is a cool grower that dislikes very hot temperature; sometimes it looks quite bedraggled in our Virginia summer, and will go almost dormant. But when cooler fall weather comes, it will grow abundantly again, producing fresh leaves even after light frosts have killed off other plants. Only a real hard frost will kill the top growth off, but it will come back very early the following spring. To extend the harvest into summer, water generously (it does like a moist soil anyway) and give it afternoon shade. Also keep picking!

Except for the occasional - and limited - slug damage in my garden, sorrel is pretty care free, winterizing easily in our

USDA hardiness zone 6, and will keep going for years. It clumps and reseeds (and, unlike sheep sorrel, **does not "run" with underground stolons**). Control reseeding by breaking off the flower stalks before they set seeds. Of the two pictures here, the first one was taken in late March (this is sorrel grown in the open, not a cold frame), so you can see how strong it looks already, when the early peonies are barely coming out. The second picture was taken about a month later when the cowslips and wild columbines bloom.

Young sorrel leaves are great in salad, older leaves are better cooked or pureed raw for dressing or cold soups. Sorrel sauce is a traditional sauce in France for

poached or broiled white fish—the tartness quite toned down with the cooking just works very well with a mild fish. A word of warning about cooking sorrel: **firstly, it disappears... it just melts into nothingness, worse than spinach** (so typically the little bunch that you find – very occasionally – in the grocery store is grossly insufficient for cooking). Second, it loses its bright granny-smith green color and turn a muddy green. I often add a few leaves of fresh sorrel when I puree cook sorrel, just to liven up the color.

We will be using sorrel in the [May cooking class](#), when you can see how it grows and taste it, fresh from the garden.



Sorrel happily growing in a moist part of my garden intermingled with other greens and cottage flowers



The Cook & the Gardener: Marvelous Spring Salads

While I am not quite sure that those directions really qualify as "recipes", they are the foundation of many a satisfying spring lunch or light dinners

thrown together when salad greens are young & abundant, I crave something "fresh" & refuse to spend a lot of time in the kitchen. Experiment and adjust proportions to match your taste.

Ingredients

- Mixture of fresh lettuce: as many varieties as possible with different textures, leaf shapes & color; the more the better (oakleaf, romaine, butterhead); other greens such as mache, spinach, radicchio, cress, young dandelion leaves (from an organic lawn) mustard, endive, arugula...
- A handful of herbs, leaves only, such as thyme, chive (cut finely), sorrel, lemon balm, fennel leaves, parsley, Fennel hyssop, mint etc
- Organically grown edible flowers such as pansy, viola, cowslip (*Primula veris*), calendula, nasturtium, arugula (rocket salad) flowers etc
- Garnish such as toasted pine nuts, walnuts or pecans, chopped hard-boiled eggs, crumbled feta or blue, thinly sliced red-onion, dry cherries, fried already cooked potato slices

Home-made dressing

- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice (or red wine vinegar or balsamic vinegar) to each 3 tablespoons of the best quality extra virgin cold pressed olive oil that you can afford.
- If the greens are on the robust side, whisk a teaspoon of mustard with the vinegar before adding the oil.
- For a sweet counterpart, a teaspoon of honey or maple syrup added along with a mustard is a nice touch.
- Other oils to try include: walnut, grape seed or avocado.

Instructions:

- Wash & dry thoroughly greens, herbs & flowers. Combine 5 parts greens to 1/2 part herbs & a handful of flowers.
- Put in a very large bowl with dressing already mixed at the bottom. Toss to coat leaves with dressing. Distribute between plates.
- To each plate, add enough garnishes to make the salad interesting but not so many or so much that the tastes overwhelm one another. Salt & pepper if desired.
- Serve with plenty of fresh crusty bread & a glass of Beaujolais - **on the deck. It's mild** enough for alfresco eating!

Examples of combinations

- Spinach; blue cheese; toasted walnut; thinly sliced red onion.
- Mixed greens with a high proportion of mild greens; toasted pine nuts; chopped dry cherries or cranberries and sliced boiled eggs.
- Mixed greens with a high proportions of robust greens, hot fried potato slices and diced cooked bacon.
- Mixed greens; feta; violas & cowslips; thinly sliced red onion; fresh garlic croutons, a poached egg or two
- Mixed greens on the robust side, thinly sliced steak quickly seared in a very hot cast iron skillet, sautéed onions, fresh thyme leaves and a sprinkling of blue cheese
- Spinach, avocado slices, thinly sliced shallots, fresh croutons
- Mixed greens, diced sun-dry tomatoes, breaded warm baked soft goat cheese (picture).

[Recipe](#)



Seasonal Menu Ideas For April

Follow the hyperlinks for recipes, from my blog's archives. Also check out the [March/April 2011 issue of Flavor Magazine](#) for more simple seasonal recipes I wrote for the Seasonal table column.

Two Course

Vegetarian

Mushroom & Butternut Squash White Lasagna
[Ginger Ice-Cream](#)

Omnivore

[Vietnamese-Inspired Rice and Chicken Soup](#)
Baked Apples with Honey, Lemon & Vanilla

Three Course

Vegetarian

Black Bean Soup
Seared Shitake Mushroom with Sesame Oil and
Wilted Spinach over Jasmine Rice
Lemon Tart

Omnivore

Spicy beet greens & goat cheese crostini
Roast Salmon with Sorrel Potatoes
Lemon & Rosemary Gelato

Four Course

Vegetarian

Radishes & Farm Cheese Tartines
Mache & Asian Pear Salad with Pecans
Asparagus Lemon Risotto
Chocolate custard

Omnivore

[Fennel Scented Carrot Soup](#)
[Baked Warm Goat Cheese over mixed greens](#)
Boeuf Bourguignon over Noodles
Rhubarb Fool

Five Course

Vegetarian

Spinach & Lentil Soup
Sautéed Morels With Chives
Whole wheat pasta with garlic, parsley & olives
Simple green salad
Rhubarb Frozen Yogurt

Omnivore

Morel & Virginia Ham Tart
Arugula & Pea shoot Salad
Roast Leg of Lamb with [Four-Herb Mongolian Green Sauce](#) and potato galette
Cheese
[Reine de Saba Cake](#) (picture below)



Brunch Ideas

- Asparagus Strata
- Upside down Rhubarb Cake
- Coddled eggs with morels & parsley
- Buttermilk Spelt Pancake with Rhubarb Compote
- Apple & Pecan Cake
- Yogurt & Rhubarb Parfait
- [Crepes with Almond Cream & Caramelized Maple Apples](#)
- [Super Easy Smoothies](#)

Laughing Duck Gardens & Cookery At A Glance



Special Event & Week-end Cookery:

- In-home catering for a special dinner, brunch or lunch, high tea, **hors d'oeuvres and more.**
- In-home catering for small weddings (up to 75 guests), wedding rehearsals, anniversaries, engagement, birthdays, showers etc at your home or your vacation rental home.
- Lamb Roasts & Pig Roasts
- Week-end/vacation cookery packages that let you fully enjoy activities in the country and come home to incredible cooked-from-scratch meals, with many locally sourced ingredients.

Personal Chef Services For Every Day Cookery

- Personal Chef Services perfect for busy families, singles or couples: the chef plans, shops, cooks and packages meals tailored to your preferences and diet (and cleans up the kitchen, of course). Available as one-time service or as a subscription.
- A La Carte cookery services (hourly) also available.

Cooking Instruction

- Workshops throughout the year show you that cooking can be fun, unfussy and rewarding - and a money saver. Topics are varied: from soup making to canning, from ice-cream making to roasting duck, from spice appreciation to cooking a feast, there is something for **everybody!** The newest series of classes "Un Dimanche A La Campagne/ Sunday in the Country" shows how to prepare a seasonal ever changing 4-course menu.
- Canning & jam making workshops in summer & fall
- Personal/private cookery lessons for a very focused one-on-one session or for a group of friends. They make a great birthday present.

Kitchen Garden & Cookery Talks: Sylvie is available for speaking to your group about food gardening or cooking. Or for demonstrations.

Gift certificates

Writing: Sylvie shares her experience about growing food and cooking locally and from the garden in her blog "[Rappahannock Cook & Kitchen Gardener](#)".

Kitchen Garden Coach: Coaching Services are perfect for somebody who is willing to do the work but need guidance or advice, whether once, occasionally or on a regular basis. Whether your questions have to do with growing, harvesting or cooking, Sylvie can help.

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