

ARTISANS

BY MICHELLE MYERS

GARLIC ICE CREAM ANYONE?

Celebrating the bulb.

AQUEBOGUE—Everything's coming up garlic. Well, at least on one acre at the Garden of Eve organic farm. On this clear early summer's day, the field is covered with bright green shoots and owner Eve Kaplan-Walbrecht is demonstrating how to nip off the scapes (the curly centers of the plants) which must be pinched to allow the bulbs to grow. Scapes are very edible and apparently quite delicious but are often discarded by garlic farmers. Kaplan-Walbrecht stows some shoots in the car and we barrel back down the lane to the Garden of Eve farmstand on Sound Avenue in Aquebogue.



Above: Eve Kaplan-Walbrecht at her farm.

Right: Garlic scapes provide a culinary preview of the bulb to come.

The farm hosted its first garlic festival in 2004. Kaplan-Walbrecht and her husband Chris were delighted that around 1500 people attended. This year the event takes place September 30 through October 1 and, says Kaplan-Walbrecht, will feature many more garlic-inspired foods and crafts than last year.

Why garlic? The Kaplan-Walbrechts first became involved through his parents, market gardeners in Norwich, New York, who invited them to the Hudson Valley Garlic Festival. The couple brought back seed garlic and planted it. The plants thrived.

Kaplan-Walbrecht believes garlic has a universal appeal: "No matter what ethnic food you're dealing with, garlic is always involved." Garlic is apparently very easy to grow but it's difficult to get it perfect. Nevertheless there are varieties that give a gustatory bang for the buck like "Music," "German Red," and "German White." Garden of Eve grows all of these varieties in addition to elephant garlic.

The garlic festival offers what Kaplan-Walbrecht views as a critical opportunity for families to learn about organic farming as well as to

sample all things garlic, like garlic ice cream (who knew?), chicken, popcorn, bread, vinegars, marinades and jellies. While the adults dare to boldly go into new culinary territory, the children will be well entertained by the petting zoo, arts and crafts and puppet theater.

Garden of Eve was founded in 2001 and is a small oasis in a desert of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and genetic modification. In addition to the garlic crop, the Kaplan-Walbrechts grow many specialty vegetables and herbs. They have 85 tillable acres and this year they are growing crops on 25 of those acres.

The farm raises chickens for organic eggs and has a small herd of young goats that are a magnet for visiting children. Organically-grown flowers round out the crops. On this day, the farmstand was also offering homemade jellies, dried flowers, leeks, and asparagus.

These are exciting times for the farm which has joined the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement. CSA is a partnership between the local farm and the community and works on a subscription basis. Currently Garden of Eve has approximately 250 participants.

Subscribers can pick up a weekly selection of organic vegetables, eggs, and flowers at locations in Riverhead, Brooklyn and Manhattan. In addition to qualifying for a 10 percent discount on all Garden of Eve farmstand products, CSA members can arrange farm tours once a year, have free admission to all educational events for adults and children and can make the most of an opportunity to pick their own vegetables.

The Kaplan-Walbrechts view their enterprise as much more than the labor of love that it clearly is on their part. It's an opportunity to support local farmers and the local economy while eating healthy produce. And the garlic festival? There's still plenty of room for additional vendors to participate and Kaplan-Walbrecht encourages any local farm to get in contact. In the meantime, the couple looks forward to converting a few garlic-phobes while sating lovers of the health-giving allium. □

