

FRUGAL FARMING: NUTRIENT APPLICATIONS

In the next few newsletters we will address the economic side of farming and what we do to reduce expenses and keep the cost of our products under control. Sustainability is both environmental and economic. If we fail on either point, then everything fails. Managing expenses is a very difficult task since unforeseen expenses always arise. Therefore, we operate from a simple, old-age concept called conservation. We first determine what we need (through testing), then we carefully measure what we use.

For example, we test our leaves for micro-nutrient deficiencies, such as boron, instead of relying on visual cues. Boron is an elemental, natural micronutrient which plays a strengthening role in the cell walls of all plants by helping to metabolize calcium, making boron a necessary nutrient. Sometimes the water supply or soil is deficient in boron and so we need to add it to the trees' diet. If our test results indicate a deficiency in boron, our crop advisor determines the proper amount of boron needed. Then we accurately measure the material and apply it via the most efficient method (air-blast sprayer) to be absorbed in through small vents in the leaves called stomata. So by precisely determining the needs of our trees, we can eliminate the additional cost of excess nutrient applications and properly tend to our trees' health.

MAY-JULY

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DRINK UP!

Recently, customers have asked which variety of almonds we recommend to make almond milk. To be honest, we didn't have an answer at first. Our family doesn't often drink almond milk, so if we want it, we buy it. In order to give a more knowledgeable answer, we needed to make it ourselves. To conduct the test, six family members serving as taste-testers tasted the almond milk and recorded their opinions. The testers did not know which variety they were drinking until later. Here are the taste results for each of the five contestants:

Monterey: definitely the sweetest of all the varieties.

Nonpareil: pretty good; sweeter than the store-bought Almond Breeze.

Fritz: watery at first, but then nutty; a different taste experience than the others.

50/50: this mix of Monterey and Nonpareil was the winner with its true, sweet almond flavor.

Almond Breeze: tasted dry; tasted cinnamon and vanilla.

So while the 50/50 mix was the favorite, it really depends on your own taste preference, as the 50/50 mix wasn't the favorite with all. We suggest you do some experimenting on your own with the different varieties. It is noteworthy that homemade almond milk, with only two ingredients (water and almonds), will last 3-5 days in the refrigerator. If you look at the store-bought Almond Breeze, you will see that it has 10 ingredients and will last 3 months in the cupboard! Which do you think is easier and better for your body to digest?!

Here is our almond milk recipe (2 1/2 cup yield): Cover 1 cup of almonds with water until the water level is about 1 inch above the almonds. Let them soak overnight. In the morning, dump out the water and rinse the almonds. Next, blend almonds and 3 cups of water for 1-2 minutes. Then, place a nut bag or cheese cloth over a bowl and pour in the almond blend. The "milk" will seep through the bag. Squeeze the bag to release all the milk. Pour milk into a well-sealed container and store in the fridge. The almond meal can be used for cooking.

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Top to bottom: a happy little lamb with its mother; the Fritz variety of almond milk; Farmer Shep, Buddy, and Brian.

FARMER SHEP VISITS THE FARM

If you remember from our last newsletter, in March over 100 sheep came to our orchard to mow down the grass and deposit fertilizer “droppings.” Now we’d like to tell you a little bit more about them and their owner, Farmer Jeremy Shepherd. These sheep are a South African breed bred to eat hardy forage and live in a more arid climate, such as that in South Africa (and in Esparto). Their breed name is “Dorpers” and their lamb meat has a delicious flavor. Their owner, Jeremy Shepherd, organically raises free-range chickens, pigs, and sheep outside of the town of Winters. When he heard we were looking for some sheep to graze our orchard, he jumped at the chance to provide his sheep with the nutritious grasses growing in our orchard. We found out later that he was actually related to a friend of ours, so it was great to get to know him in this way. You can find Farmer Shep on Facebook. Don’t forget to “like” our own Facebook page if you haven’t already: <https://www.facebook.com/capayhillsorchard/>

In accordance with food safety requirements, we said goodbye to Farmer Shep, his sheepdog Buddy, and 114 Dorpers sheep in May, 90+ days before harvest. The orchard was nice and neat, and the sheep were happy and healthy. Mission accomplished.



NO ROUNDUP!

Almonds have always been known to have huge health benefits when added to a regular diet, due to their essential vitamins and minerals and their all-important job as antioxidants. In addition, when the nuts are not pasteurized, they still contain valuable enzymes that help our intestines with digestion. But these enzymes are not the only reason to buy organic and raw. Years of organic farming and observing conventional farming has allowed us to make first-hand comparisons between the two methods. Probably the most visible difference between organic and more conventional methods is the use of the chemical glyphosate—also known as Roundup.

This is where organic practices come in to save the day. Most conventional farmers (but not all) use Roundup in shocking amounts to eliminate weeds from their orchard. These farmers strip-spray their orchard with Roundup; that is, they spray the orchard floor underneath the trees in a wide strip, allowing only a narrow strip in the middle of the orchard lanes to grow grass (of course this is mowed regularly). A conventional almond farmer and neighbor of ours hardly even lets a three-foot wide strip grow and even sprays the entire perimeter of his orchard. Needless to say, any chemical used in such extreme amounts as this should be dangerous. And it is. If you’d like to read more about the effects of Roundup, check out this article written by a UC Davis doctor. In addition, check out this article by the Organic Center if you’d like to read about the lack of antibiotics in organic practices.

- <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/866710>
- https://www.organic-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TOC_Report_AntibioticResistance_FINAL.pdf