



# Kitchen Improv

by Hilary Giovale

I love my CSA. I have been a member of the Flagstaff Community Supported Agriculture for about 8 years and it has totally changed the way I eat, my cooking prowess, my health and wellness, my kids' ability to eat vegetables, and so much more. Being part of a CSA creates a way of cooking and eating that intersects with and compliments my life as a Tribal Bellydancer.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a type of program that mutually supports farmers and community members. Typically, people sign up for a 3 or 4-month subscription to a weekly share of produce and commit to picking it up at a central location each week. We get produce that is fresh, local, in season, and grown using sustainable farming methods (no pesticides and

chemical fertilizers) and/or is certified organic. Farmers benefit from a secure income by having their produce paid for up front, and a steady supply of customers to enjoy their vegetables. CSA members share the risks inherent in farming—like bugs and weather impacting the crops. Together, we reduce the distance from farm to table (hence less fossil fuels) and support local economies.

## CSA and Tribal Bellydance:

### What's the connection?

#### As Tribal Bellydancers, what do we do best?

##### We glow:

Our bodies are the tools and medium for our dance. Eating all those veggies makes my body strong, vital, and gives me energy for an active dancing life.

##### We delight:

Just like the beautiful tapestry of Tribal Style, every week at the CSA is a surprise and a feast for the senses. There may be dark green kale, crunchy Persian cucumbers, bright orange yams, nopales cactus, or multicolored homegrown eggs.

##### We connect:

As Tribal dancers, we learn to dance with a variety of personalities and bodies; through our CSA, I've learned how to work with a variety of vegetables. For example, puréed turnips and eggs make a yummy casserole when baked. Mustard greens are tamed with a creamy coconut curry sauce, and roots like rutabaga are delicious when roasted.

##### We expand our repertoire and improvise:

I've met and made friends with so many women as a dancer and also befriended new types of foods in the CSA. I've learned to use purslane and amaranth greens (which are actually highly nutritious weeds) kohlrabi (a bulb that tastes similar to broccoli) and Chinese greens like tatsoi. Favorite recipes can be adapted to new foods; new recipes can be made up on the spot!

##### We share:

It's been my joy to educate others and build community through Tribal bellydance and a CSA member. Serving this food to my children has helped them be knowledgeable about what they eat and where it comes

from, and they actually like to eat vegetables. When I have excess veggies to share with friends and neighbors, I feel good about contributing to my community.

### **We include:**

One thing I love most about Tribal Dance is that its aesthetic includes all types of women from all stages of life. Likewise, our CSA reaches out to include a diverse population by accepting food stamps and operating a member-funded scholarship program for families who are experiencing food insecurity.

### **Practical Tips for Joining a CSA**

#### **Split a Share:**

When you first start, the amount of produce can seem a little daunting, especially if you don't usually eat vegetables. I recommend splitting a share with a friend. Each week, you can meet and divide up the produce according to what you each like. Once you're comfortable with this, it's easy to move up to a whole share.

#### **Be Adventurous:**

Know that you will receive items from time to time that seem unfamiliar or have strong flavors. This is a perfect time to look up recipes online if you're wondering what to do with that particular vegetable. It's also a great time to consult fellow CSA members. In our area, we get lots of turnips during the winter; sometimes I'm scratching my head trying to think of something novel to do with turnips week after week. I've gotten the best ideas and inspirations from asking my friends what they're doing with their turnips, things I never would have thought of - like coleslaw or fritters!

### **Be Strategic:**

You'll have the skeleton of a week's meals from your CSA produce, but you'll need to fill out the meals by making a visit to the grocery store. Make a plan and you can easily have your food planned for the whole week, saving yourself both time and energy.

### **Be Committed:**

There have been times when my children have begged to go out to dinner and I've said no because I have a fridge full of collards, rapini, and radishes. If you're committed to using those veggies each week, your diet and budget will improve radically!

### **Be Forgiving:**

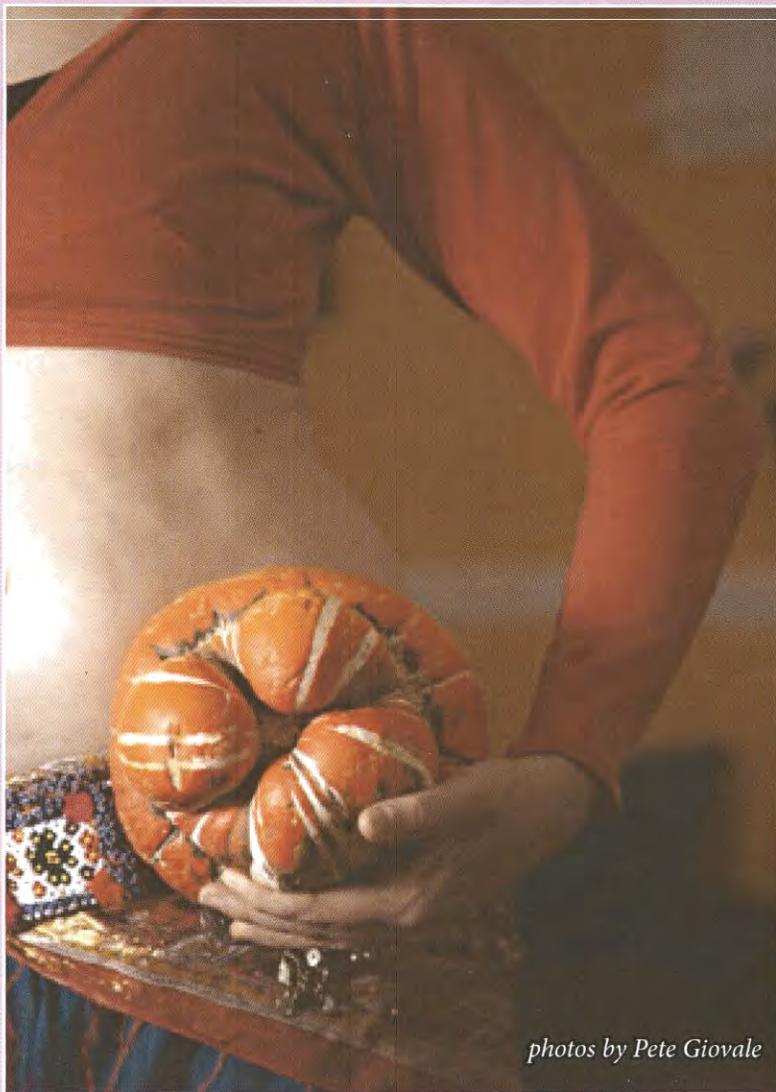
There have also been times when I just can't stand another batch of turnips, chicory or whatever else does not get used. If it's still fresh, this is a great chance to build community by sharing with a neighbor. If it's past its prime, feed it to some chickens or compost it.

### **Eating Well**

#### **on the Tribal Path**

For me, the Tribal Way of Life encompasses all elements of health and wellness, and being

a member of our CSA has helped me on my Tribal Path. When I nurture my local food systems and economy, I become more vital and abundant. When I take a chance on trying a new dish, I open myself up to the similar delight and novelty I experience when learning a new combination or performing a new set. When I take care to nourish the life systems of Mother Earth by supporting organic agriculture, I nourish myself at the deepest level and expand my ability to create diverse art and beauty in the world.



*photos by Pete Giovale*