CLASS OUTLINES

January

January 4, 2013 – FENNEL

Goal of lesson: Give as much information as necessary about crop for farmers to make an informed decision about whether or not they would like to try growing it this year. Additional information given: how do Americans eat this crop (given so that farmers have an idea of how to talk to customers about crop). Additional goal – help farmers begin to memorize which plants are in the Apiaceae family.

Slide 1 – what the word and the plant look like

Slide 2 - what is in the same family: they all have umbel shaped flowers

Slide 3 – what is in the same family: swallow tail caterpillar likes to eat their greens

Slide 4- what is in the same family: some of them have similar looking seeds

Slide 5 - what is in the same family: their leaves look similar

Slide 6 – what is in the same family: another example of similar looking leaves; these leaves look different than the previous slide – the way a plant looks is just one of the ways you can tell that plants are related and it isn’t always accurate.

Slide 7 - what does fennel taste like: licorice, sweet, fennel; not a flavor that many people like

Slide 8 - how do Americans eat fennel: raw on or as salad

Slide 9 – how do Americans eat fennel: and eaten as a meal or added to pasta

Slide 10 - how do Americans eat fennel: with chicken, other meat, fish, or other seafood

Slide 11 - when is fennel ready to harvest and sell in Maine: June through September

Slide 12 – from seed to harvest in 2 months – this is similar to other crops that you grow such as carrots, beets, and lettuce. Who can think of other crops with same growing time?

Slide 13 – you can harvest fennel at different sizes – baby fennel is ready to harvest in one month

Slide 14 – some customers like big fennel with no tops

Slide 15 - some customers like big fennel with tops – ask your customers what they like. When you start taking fennel to market, take fennel with and without tops; for CSA, I like to leave tops on because it is big and beautiful

Slide 16 - In Maine, you can start fennel in the greenhouse or direct seed it in the ground

Slide 17 – start fennel in greenhouse in April, May, June, and July. Just like beets and carrots, you can plant many successions of fennel in one season.

Slide 18 - transplant it outside 4-6 weeks later at one foot spacing for big fennel, 6 inch spacing for baby fennel. Fennel grows very wide, so only 2 rows/bed.

Slide 19 – Direct seed fennel in April, may, june, and july. One seed every 6 inches; cover lightly with soil

Slide 20 - you can harvest fennel in june, but our markets, CSA and wholesale don’t really get started until July. Plan to harvest from July – October

Slide 21 – the flavor of fennel is not negatively impacted by heat, cold, or drought. It tastes good (to some customers) all year.

Slide 22 – It bolts quickly in heat – just like broccoli. So, only plant as much as you think you can easily sell. Plant just a little bit each month

Slide 23 – fennel starting to bolt – begins to elongate into pyramid – probably not sellable at this point

Slide 24 – Then a flower stalk starts to shoot up out of the middle – it is not sellable at this point

Slide 25 - then the fennel produces flowers and seeds

Slide 26 - bolted fennel is tough and tastes bad. The inedible core becomes bigger and bigger and bigger

Slide 27 – Fennel is unfamiliar to many Americans. Some people love fennel; some people hate fennel. Give it to CSA one time each month or less.

Slide 28 – fennel and Chinese cabbage have some similarities – the are both easy to grow, easy to harvest and wash, look very nice in a CSA box or at the market….but they can be hard to sell if you don’t have the right customers. Example – customers in Portland love fennel, but it is very, very hard to sell in Lewiston.

Slide 29 – 1 foot spacing for big fennel

Slide 30 – two rows per bed because it grows very wide

Slide 31 – likes well drained, but not dry soil

Slide 32 - fennel doesn’t have a ton of pests – swallow tail caterpillar, deer, aphids, and cut worms. Hand pick caterpillars; scout for cutworm damage and dig out larvae; aphids are caused by too wet soil; deer are hard to control!

Slide 33 - fennel diseases – it doesn’t have a lot of disease problems in Maine!

Slide 34 – harvest with knife or strong clippers – I will demonstrate this summer

Slide 35 - easy to clean – either spray it with water or wash in wash tub

Slide 36 – baby fennel is usually sold as a bunch; big fennel is sold in two different ways: per pound or by the each. Price differs greatly among markets. I will help each of you assess appropriate price for your market this summer.

Slide 37- Sell with tops on or off

Slide 38 – fennel can be sold by the pound and are often sold for the same price as carrots

Slide 39 – very nice addition to CSA no more than 1/month in summer or fall

Slide 40 – not many varieties of fennel to pick from. Fedco you can buy 600 seeds for $3.00