



The Garden of.... , Los Olivos, CA Shu & Debby Takikawa

Walking up to the market table for The Garden Of... is a feast for both the eyes and the palate. One look at the crisp, overflowing heads of lettuce, thick and intensely green bunches of kale, and bright the carrots, beets, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower - it's clear that farmers Shu and Debby Takikawa take pride in their vegetable bounty.

Shu first came to California from his native Japan in the 1980's, and began working for Nature Farm, a large organic farm based in Camarillo. Debby had been living and working on her family's 24-acre farm in Los Olivos, which is home to some of the first wine grapes planted in the Santa Ynez Valley. After Shu and Debby were married, they settled at Debby's family farm and began The Garden Of ... in the early 1980's on 4 acres of assorted vegetables, greens, and flowers.

For the past several years, Shu & Debby have leased increasingly more acreage to meet the growing demand for their produce. Last year, when a 66-acre tract of gorgeous Santa Ynez farmland located a block away from their farm came up for lease, Shu and Debby leapt at the chance. "For years we drove by that land every day, wishing we were able to farm it," says Debby, "and now we are thrilled to have the room to farm properly and remediate the soil." Because this newly acquired land was previously farmed conventionally, Shu and Debby are dedicated to enriching the land through strictly organic cultivation. They have already achieved "Certified Transitional" recognition from CCOF on these new fields, as they work to restore the soil through cover cropping, applications of organic compost, crop rotation, and giving the land plenty of rest between plantings.

When asked about Shu's farming practices that yield such beautiful vegetables week after week, Debby quickly points to his diligence and innate observation skills. "Shu doesn't farm on a schedule," she attests, "he is constantly walking the land and listening to the plants - deciding when they need water, and exactly how much, through quiet and careful observation."

The Takikawas live and grow by the highest standards of cultivation, and they are passionate about the value of transitioning conventional fields back to organic cultivation, as well as preserving the landscape from urban sprawl. "We live in one of the best growing climates in the country," says Shu, "and we must protect these fields from turning into pavement!"

Shu's commitment to organic agriculture and willingness to share his knowledge has made him a respected mentor for many young farmers in the area. Thanks to past experiences managing young apprentices at Nature Farm, Shu has a knack for teaching young farmers the ropes. "I love seeing all the new, young farmers at the markets," says Shu, "it's especially exciting to see more vegetable farmers coming from where we are in the Santa Ynez Valley."

Just as beginning farmers are drawn to Shu for guidance and practical skills - friends, family and local chefs gather at The Garden Of... table on market days to get their fill of lush greens and assorted vegetables. The farm has been a constant presence at the Tuesday and Saturday Santa Barbara farmers' markets, as well as two bustling markets in LA on Sundays. The market offerings from The Garden Of ... has generated quite a buzz in LA's markets - even esteemed LA Time's Food writer David Karp has written about the superior flavor and beauty of Shu's produce (June 2012). What makes all the hard work worth it? Says Shu - "Just before the market bell rings, I take a step back and look at the produce on our table, and say to myself: Just look how beautiful they are! - I love that moment."