

Most of the food we consume comes from right here on the farm. This time of year the freezers, fruit cellar shelves, and root cellar have shrinking stores of supplies, but with spring and the beginning of a new growing season at hand, this situation is about to be reversed.

It is always gratifying to take advantage of those first harvests in May. A rhubarb custard pie in the refrigerator is waiting for the coffee to cook, and a bag of fresh asparagus will be transformed into a key ingredient in today's quiche. The salad greens in the hoop house are at their best now, too, and there are still plenty of good potatoes, once their sprouts are removed. Food is still plentiful.

I was annoyed, though, when I took the last package of butter from the freezer a few weeks ago. I don't like to buy butter, because we much prefer the home churned kind from Buttercup and Effie. But, too much Christmas baking this past winter depleted our store a little earlier than usual.

Now, though, Buttercup has had her calf, and we are milking her again. Actually, it is a joint project. Her heifer calf milks one side while Runo milks the other. Meanwhile, I get the little cream separator ready to go, and soon, as I turn the crank, a small stream of rich cream flows from one spout while frothy skim milk pours from the other.

So, we have homemade butter again. When Effie has her calf later in the summer, there will be even more cream for butter, and there will be milk for cheese and yogurt as well. But, for now, Buttercup's contribution suffices. We are glad to have our own butter once more.

In the garden, life is also showing again. We had such a dry period during late winter and early spring that we wondered if we would get the rain the garden needed before planting time. Now, we try to plant a little more every time there is time enough between rains to allow the soil to dry out a little. Peas are up, onions, as well, and small seedlings of the frost hardy plants are also starting to show. We dare not set out tomato plants before June, and we are leery of planting beans and corn until later, as well.

The USDA growing zone has changed in recent years. We used to be classified as Zone 4, but now, I have seen charts listing our area as

Zone 5. This may be accurate for some parts of our area, but not where we live. Zone 4 plants have never been winter-safe here, and with February temperatures this year consistently below zero--and as low -37F.--we are still definitely Zone 3. We plant accordingly and look for frosty nights in June and August. We usually get them and sometimes, in July, as well.

Mother Nature also provides us with some spring delicacies. Morel mushrooms seem quite plentiful this year. Some have accompanied our omelets. I roll the little morels in seasoned corn meal and fry them in plenty of butter. The hens' consumption of spring grass has made the egg yolks bright yellow, almost orange. They make very attractive omelets, and the addition of wild morsels like morels only adds to the luxury of the meal.

Wild leeks--ramps--abound in the woods right now, too, and it is also time for me to gather small birch leaves to dry for tea. We have never harvested fiddleheads, but they, too, are one of Nature's spring gifts.

Eating closer to the source of our food is more work than going to the grocery store and coming home with packages of all the things that go into our meals. It is also more satisfying to know where our food originates, how crops are grown and animals fed, and to know that our labor has a direct connection--with no intermediate steps--to our own survival. We think foods taste better that way, too.