

I am beginning to have some hope that the vegetable garden will once again produce food. I have no faith in seeds coming up or plants growing. In spite of growing most of our food in our garden every year, it always seems like a remarkable thing--those little seeds and plants actually change into a full root cellar, jars in the fruit cellar, and a full freezer.

Now, though, in the early part of July, we are beginning to enjoy fresh vegetables from the garden every day. There have been greens for a long time, and lettuce and spinach have been excellent this year. The snap peas are ready now, there are chard, kale, and beet greens, and onions are big enough to use.

There were strawberries, too, and now, the raspberries are just starting to ripen. So, many of our meals are very local in origin--the food is grown approximately six hundred feet from the house.

But, best of all, we have new potatoes. There is a period in the late spring when we are without potatoes. Last year's spuds have provided seed for this year's crop, and although we have enough to use for cooking, too, they just aren't very good anymore. Rice and pasta have appeared on the table much more frequently than during other parts of the year.

For the last couple of weeks, though, I have occasionally "scrabbled" a few hills of potatoes to extract a little new potato here and there, enough for a scanty serving for each of us. But, today, I decided that the time had come to dig around the hills a little more vigorously, and I have a colander full of nice, white potatoes of various sizes. Tomorrow, I will cook them and make a "new potato salad" with dill, vinegar, and olive oil.

If I could have only one crop in the garden, it would be potatoes. I can't think of any other vegetable whose absence from our meals would be missed as much as potatoes.

We grow several varieties. The hills I have been "scrabbling" for those first little tubers have been from the Onaway beds. They are round white potatoes, good almost any way they are cooked. But we have others, too. There are the Butte russets, those long, smooth baking

potatoes. There are Satinas, similar to Yukon gold, but more productive, for us, at least. We have Red Marias, too. They are pretty red skinned potatoes with white flesh, and are good for cooking, baking, frying, and salads. And, there are the French Fingerlings, those fancy long, small red potatoes that usually appear on our Christmas Eve smörgåsbord.

We eat potatoes nearly every day except during that spring spell between the end of the old crop and the beginning of the new. We eat them baked, boiled, mashed, fried, in salads, scalloped, in the Norwegian flatbread called *lefse*, in soup, stew, and mashed together with rutabagas for Swedish *rotmos*.

The Scandinavian neighborhood where I grew up set great store by potatoes. The extra from noon dinner's boiled potatoes could provide fried potatoes for supper. The cook who prepared mashed potatoes for the midday meal often planned on having enough leftovers for potato patties--the mashed potatoes mixed with beaten egg and chopped onion--to fry in butter in the evening. Fried potatoes were also a popular breakfast dish, perhaps along with home cured bacon and eggs from the farm's hens.

I read cookbooks as avidly as novels or serious nonfiction volumes, and one of my favorite books is devoted entirely to potatoes. I check it out of the library at least once a year to see if there is some tasty way to prepare potatoes that I have not tried.

When we were growing up, we also had our fingers in the kettle while our mother was peeling potatoes. Raw potato with salt is good, too, and I still eat a piece or two if I am peeling spuds.

So, when I grope blindly in the dirt under a hill of potatoes in full bloom, I never know what I will find. This morning, my hand grasped a full-sized potato, one that will have to be cut into pieces to match in cooking time the smaller ones I found. Now, back to the garden to get some dill.