

Preparing meals during the garden season provides the opportunity for improvisation. I know people who have weekly and even monthly meal plans. They know if it is the first Monday in August that they will have a particular dish for the main part of their meal. Some even go so far as to have desserts, side dishes, and relishes planned ahead.

I can't do that, and I wouldn't want to if I could. We eat our dinner at noon in the traditional farm manner. Supper is something light, a sandwich, salad, or a similar easy and simple meal. Midday dinner provides us with our main sustenance.

It is easy to prepare meals more quickly during the winter. Then, I can go to the root cellar, the fruit cellar, and the freezer and come up with all of the ingredients for dinner. Our "fast food" is the result of summer and fall preservation.

During the summer, though, I don't really know what we are going to have for dinner before I make my daily morning tour of the vegetable garden. We eat our breakfast when we get up and then go to the barn to do the morning chores there. When I go to the chicken coop to let out the hens and feed and water the young chickens, I find it handiest to take the waterers to the garden to clean and fill. It is quicker and not so far as it is back to the barn.

While in the garden filling the waterers I might take a walk among the garden beds to see what is ready to harvest. I don't pick anything at that time, but I have a better idea of what is available in the vegetable plots.

Later, after midmorning coffee, I will go back to the garden and pick the ingredients for dinner that day. During the early part of the summer, of course, much of most meals still comes from the freezer. In our climate of late springs and early falls, warm weather crops are long in coming. But, greens of all kinds, plus onions, are ready early. By July, I can usually also grope around the potato plants and find small new potatoes to anchor the meal.

This morning, I went to the garden as usual. The first stop I made with my old colander was at one of the earliest potato beds. I put enough Onaway potatoes in my container for dinner. Then I went to the

tap where water is available. I sloshed the clear water around the potatoes until they were nearly clean enough to cook. Then, with my other garden colander, I looked around to see what else was ready to eat.

We had had chard and kale the day before, so I didn't stop at those beds. There were snap peas to pick again, and they would make a good accompaniment to the small head of pure white cauliflower I had noticed yesterday. I had tied the leaves up around the growing cauliflower heads to keep them blanched a creamy white. But, I could feel the edible head easily with my hand. I cut the cauliflower from its stem and slipped it into the colander. Then, I picked the Sugar Ann snap peas. I pulled an onion to add also and remembered that I had a new head of garlic in the kitchen. I had harvested it the day before.

At home, in the refrigerator, was a small package of fresh lean ground pork. After cleaning my vegetables thoroughly and putting the potatoes on the stove to cook, I made patties of the pork, seasoned them, and arranged them in the frying pan. While the potatoes and meat were cooking, I snipped the ends and strings from the peas, divided the cauliflower into flowerets, and sliced the onion. I sautéed the mixed vegetables in olive oil, sprinkled on a little salt and pepper, and they were ready for the table. I'd melted some butter in the potato pan, as well, and added snippets of dill. Dinner was ready.

There is not always dessert at our cabin, but right now, raspberries are in season. We do not have a large crop this year, but there are enough to eat fresh and a few extra to use for jam. A sauce dish of raspberries warm from the sunny garden with a little sugar and some of Buttercup's cream makes an easy and tasty finish to a meal.

When I got up this morning, I had no idea what we would have for dinner. The meat was thawed in the refrigerator, but what I'd find in the garden was more uncertain. I knew only that the meal would focus on fresh, organic vegetables that we had cared for ourselves. And I don't know what will be on our plates tomorrow. But I do know that most of it will be food we have raised ourselves with what we consider to be high standards of quality and freshness.