

August is a harvest month here. We are "grass farmers" who do not raise corn or small grains, and the hay is already in the barn. But, there is plenty to harvest in the garden. We cannot downplay the importance of what is produced in that 100X100 foot space. Right now, to an eye that seeks order, it looks as if weeds are our main crop. But, hidden among those plants we did not sow is our main sustenance for the year ahead.

It is not only weeds that obscure our vegetables as they grow. We always mulch our garden, this year with oat straw. That keeps down weed growth, especially in the early summer. But, this year, the straw that we used--leftover from that we purchased to bed the lambing pens this past spring--had been harvested by a combine that spewed out an inordinate amount of grain with the straw. This wasn't noticeable while I mulched, but it wasn't long before those shoots of green advertised the presence of oats in the mulch around the vegetable beds.

This didn't actually hurt anything. The mulch still kept the weeds at bay for the early part of the summer, but it doesn't look so nice. Still, those oats--now gray-green and headed out nicely--will make more "green manure" to enrich the garden soil.

A short spell of hot, dry weather has taken its toll on some crops. The early broccoli quit producing, and the filet beans gave up as well, but I had already picked what we needed for a winter's supply. The beets didn't do very well this year, but I pulled them and pickled what was there.

Carrots look fine, and we are using them nearly every day. There will be plenty for winter.

We are getting sufficient cucumbers for fresh use, and there are plenty to use in pickle making, too. The dill is ready, as well, so dill pickles are on the agenda.

We have harvested part of our onions and all of our garlic. The nearly 800 garlic cloves that Runo planted last fall developed this spring and summer into large, fragrant bulbs, and they are now curing on racks in the hay barn. The onions are there, too, hanging in bunches. The rest of the onions are a little later, so they will stay in their garden beds for a

few weeks yet.

Our tomato plants are healthy and have lots of green tomatoes, but we have some pest that is taking bites out of too many just as they begin to ripen. I have resorted to picking the fruits just as they begin to turn, but I still throw away as many as I bring home. We have not been able to catch or see the varmint.

And then, there is my favorite crop. The potatoes are ripe now, and we will soon dig them and store them in the root cellar. There are five varieties, and I have dug at least one hill of each to see what kind of a crop we can expect this year.

Earlier in the season, I "scrabbled" the hills, stealing a young potato here and there to make a meal. Now, though, we will dig one bed at a time, pick up the spuds and put them in bushel and half bushel crates for winter storage. It does not look as if the potatoes are quite as large as last year, but they are very nice--so far.

The strawberries and summer raspberries are gone, of course, and the new plants are in rows that need maintenance. But, my attention now is focused on a short row of fall-bearing raspberries. We had the first small harvest last year, and the berries were delicious and as pretty as they were tasty. There should be more this year unless we have a very hard early frost.

So, although the garden is full of weeds, our winter food supply is intact. Once harvesting begins, I have time only for food preservation, not for much weeding and hoeing. I think it is as I read in an old book. The garden is "laid by" when the food crops have the advantage over the weeds. The weeds are not gone, but they are not hampering the production of the vegetables. That sounds good to me.