

The freezers are filling up, and there are fewer and fewer jars on the fruit cellar shelves that are empty. With a little color showing in the leaves and with gardens that are losing their produce to our winter storage areas, we know that fall is here.

Almost every day, there is something that is ready to preserve for winter. It is a busy time, and I often wonder which job to start first. Sometimes, I have the bad judgement to begin working on several tasks simultaneously even though I have read many times that multi-tasking doesn't really work. So, if the tomato sauce scorches while I am shelling beans, it is my own fault.

So far, though, the preserving season has gone very well. Some of our garden crops produced better than others. That is always the case, and fortunately, the same vegetables do not often fail two years in a row. So, though we had almost no tomatoes last year due to a untimely hail storm, we had enough from the previous year to get us through the winter, and now those jars are once again filled with the brilliance of home grown heirloom tomatoes.

I canned black beans a couple of days ago. There are also dry black beans that can be stored in a bag as they are, but there were some that were not ripe enough to keep in that way, so I canned them in the pressure canner--along with a tiny crop of Jackson Wonder lima beans. They will be handy on a winter day when I need beans for a meal but have not remembered to cook the dry ones.

A small freezer is filled nearly to capacity with butter. Effie and Buttercup have provided all the cream we need to churn butter for the winter. We use a lot of butter in baking and cooking and home rendered lard for pie crust, so much of the fat we use comes from here on the farm.

Some mornings, we do not use our cream separator and instead, bring the milk home as it is--with none of the fat removed. Then, I make feta-like cheese that also freezes well. I cube it and store it in jars with olive oil, garlic, and herbs.

Many vegetables freeze well, too. We have numerous bags of broccoli, peas, French filet beans, corn, and spinach. We don't neglect

eating our vegetables in winter, even if they aren't quite the same as the summer crops fresh from the garden. They still taste better than anything we can purchase.

Cooking in the summer is certainly fun. There are all kinds of fresh vegetables and fruits to use, and the variety and combinations of foods are nearly limitless. But, preparing meals during the colder seasons is also satisfying. The heartier soups, stews, and casseroles are easy to put together, and we never sit down to a meal without thinking about the origin of its components. Most of the time, nearly everything on the table had its start right here on the farm. I would be in a state of panic if we did not have enough food stored to take us through the winter.

We are pretty much ready for winter as far as food is concerned, but there is still sauerkraut to make, there are carrots to harvest, and we have squash to bring in. I can't think of better work than this--providing our sustenance for the months ahead.