

I wonder if people who raise at least part of their own food have a different way of looking at what they eat than the ones who buy everything at a supermarket. I have read that those who purchase vegetables and fruits at a farmers' market like to do so not only because the food is fresh and delicious, but because meeting the farmer who raises the crops "puts a face" on their food.

This may well be true, and we think that raising one's own food goes even further. Each meal on our table brings to mind the origins of the dishes we consume.

I thought about this the other day while I was eating a dish of applesauce. If I had bought applesauce at a store, I would have no mental picture of anything except perhaps the glass jar in which it was packed. I might have noticed that it had a nice color or that the flavor was very good, or maybe just so so.

But, the applesauce that was our dessert evoked much more personal pictures. I saw in my mind the old Duchess of Oldenburg tree in the yard of the farm house. I smelled the perfume of its spring blossoms, and I remembered the hummingbird nest we'd discovered in its branches one year.

I saw the ripening apples, their weight heavy on the branches of the century old tree. I remembered sitting in that tree when I was a girl, a salt shaker in my hand, eating apples.

And, I recalled how, after a wind storm, we picked up the fallen apples, used some for sauce, and carried the rest to the pigs, who were just as pleased as we were at the bounty that came their way.

Finally, as I tasted the sauce, I remembered the numerous apple pies that also came from those fruits, and I saw the jars of bright sauce as they came out of the canner. And, I think that the applesauce tasted even better flavored with the sum of these memories.

It is the same way with our garden vegetables, with the raspberries and strawberries, and even with the meat we consume. Every potato on our plates came from the rich garden soil, cared for by us, dug with a garden fork and tossed into crates with our own dirty hands. We remember the earthworms that wriggled in the moist soil when we were

planting, and we can recall the taste of those first "new potatoes," scarcely bigger than quarters, that we try to have ready each year by the fourth of July.

Now, when the new gardening year is getting under way, our thoughts of food are mostly "future" ones. As we sow seeds and set out plants, we anticipate the meals we will have from the vegetables we grow. The tiny black garden leek seeds hold the prospect of a leek/potato soup. The kernels of Painted Mountain heirloom corn bring visions of corn meal for waffles and pancakes. The wrinkly beet seeds promise beet pickles and a roasted vegetable dish, and the flat lettuce seeds are the beginnings of daily summer salads.

Growing our own food, or most of it, is satisfying on many levels. We are not dependent on anonymous industrial food farms for our sustenance, we don't need to go to the supermarket often, and we understand how our food is raised. We know that no pesticides, herbicides, or chemical fertilizers were used in its production. Best of all, though, we realize how satisfying it is to have meals that are delicious and that we raised ourselves from their beginnings.