

This is the most difficult season of the year in which to prepare meals--at least, for me. It is not that we lack food. The freezers, root cellar, and fruit cellar have sustenance for months yet, but the beginning of the growing season always makes us impatient for all the fresh vegetables and fruits that will soon make cooking easy and satisfying.

Looking at the garden now--some beds planted and many yet to receive their seeds or plants, it is hard to imagine the bounty that the soil will produce through the summer and fall. I know, when I think logically, that there is no reason that we won't be able to raise our food this year as well as any year in the past. It is likely that some plants will do well and others will be less productive, but, fortunately, it is not the same vegetables that have problems year after year. A glut of tomatoes one year is insurance against a hail storm or untimely frost the next year. Raccoons in the sweet corn--when we think we have one more day before we need to set up the electric netting--might deprive us of fresh corn, but there is probably a supply in the freezer from the previous year.

We have spinach and arugula in the unheated greenhouse now, so that helps meals. And, there will soon be lettuce and radishes. We could also begin to eat garlic greens, but that is not necessary, since last year's garlic is still good.

But, although we have potatoes left, they aren't as good as they were through the fall and winter, and the onions are gone. So, we watch and wait for the new crops of everything we enjoy.

Two crops, though, make mealtime pleasant this time of year. Most people like asparagus, and we have enough to add it to a meal every day this time of year. We are not alone in being grateful for its springtime appearance.

The other vegetable that perks up our late May / early June eating is not so popular with some people, but we love rhubarb. I have heard it described as "a vegetable masquerading as a fruit," while tomatoes are "fruits masquerading as vegetables." Whatever one calls it, we use rhubarb as a fruit. Rhubarb meringue pie is on the menu often this time of year. We eat sauce that is sweetened, cooked, and thickened--either

with a little potato starch, or with chia seeds--and we don't turn our noses up at it for any meal--breakfast, dinner, or supper. Plenty of bags end up in the freezer, too, so that we can have rhubarb year round.

Probably what is most difficult for me is the absence of potatoes that are not sprouting and beginning to wither. It is only during this time of year that we use much rice or pasta, and though we make a variety of dishes with those ingredients, we really prefer potatoes.

So, the first signs of green leaves poking up in the potato beds are good omens. We hope to have small new potatoes to cook by the fourth of July. The strawberries are blooming, and there are even small berries on some plants. The raspberries are budded, too, and the apple trees seem to have survived the frosty mornings. Before we know it, the garden will be filled with green growing plants, and we will begin to experience the fresh flavors of the seasons once again. We are always grateful to have food enough to store for winter, but we are equally thankful when the new crops are ready to spice up the menu.