

We have a market just 200 meters from the cabin. It is stocked with as good food as one would find anywhere, and better than what we can find in the supermarket some miles away. Choices are extensive, but still limited in our personal market, but the quality of the selections makes up for that.

When we drive through our part of the world, whether we are in the rural area or in the towns and small cities, the most puzzling question we pose is: “Why don’t most people have vegetable gardens?” We have never found a satisfactory answer. To be sure, gardening is work, but it is pleasant labor, and we pay no fees to a health club or the Y. And, the benefits are multiple and delicious.

I shop at our market every day. I pick what is ready. Menus are determined by the availability of vegetables. I don’t plan dishes involving tomatoes, for instance, until I see ripe fruits on our plants. Corn—on or off the cob—isn’t part of a meal until a couple of days after we have put up the electric netting around the sweet corn rows. The raccoons know when it is time to eat corn, and their decision to ravage the crop comes just a day or two before we deem it far enough along to eat.

Just now, we are harvesting our first cucumbers. They are not numerous enough yet for pickling. They are fresh and crisp, and peeled and sprinkled with a little salt or sliced with fresh onions and doused with a little vinegar, they sometimes don’t even make it to mealtime. There is little similarity to a “store” cucumber.

We begin eating new potatoes as soon as they are little bigger than marbles. For the first few weeks, I carefully dig in the hills, taking a potato here and there without damaging the vines. Now, though, the potatoes are much larger, and sometimes, I pull a plant and take all of the tubers instead of just “stealing” one potato each from several vines.

Eating from this very local market means that we often consume the same kinds of vegetables day after day. That is because we eat what is ready. I adjust recipes and ingredients according to what is available.

It is notable that we don’t get tired of eating the same vegetables over periods of days or weeks. Probably, the freshness of what we pick out of our own garden just a couple of hundred meters from the cabin is partly responsible. Though farmers’ markets are the next best choice, even those products are farther from our table—both in space and time—than what we can grow ourselves.

The much vilified zucchini is an example of a vegetable that is so versatile, suited to so many recipes, that we can eat it—in one form or another—as long as the plants are producing. And, what we cannot consume, the young chickens eagerly peck asunder, eating the tender inside portions like I would eat candy. Today, I sliced the yellow summer squash and browned the slices in olive oil and butter. We ate two good-sized fruits in this way, the border collies getting no more than a taste.

So, we eat through the seasons. First, in the spring, come the greens—lettuce, mache, claytonia, spinach, chard, bok choy, and more. Then, tiny beets, accompanied by their greens, plus small onions, peas, little carrots, and

the first of those zucchinis. Potatoes are always available by July, and by that time, we also have dill and parsley to accompany them. Green beans come in July, plus those first cucumbers. This year, the garlic was ready for harvest by the middle of July. By the end of the month, we are anticipating the first tomatoes, but a lot depends on the season. Along with the tomatoes, the peppers and aubergine vines are usually producing in August, giving us the rest of the ingredients we want for the tomato sauces we need for winter. Sometimes, in late summer, we will have a few ripe watermelons or muskmelons, but our microclimate isn't very friendly for heat loving crops. After tomatoes we await the fall root crops—fully ripe potatoes, pumpkins, winter squash of various kinds, and several varieties of dry beans.

We think our food is unbeatable. And yet, we know that family after family in our own area could be enjoying the same quality of food if they would only try raising a garden. And many people do. But, many more have the opportunity, if only they would take that first step, maybe putting in a raised bed or two and growing a few vegetables. Before long, they would be committed to producing as much of their own food as they reasonably could.