

After decades of cooking for two, I am now cooking for four. Since we eat mostly what we raise ourselves, I have noticed that the bushel crates of potatoes in the root cellar are diminishing much more quickly. The frozen green beans, broccoli, and cauliflower are disappearing at a new level, too. Onions, garlic, bread, desserts—consumption of all of these has increased significantly. On the rare occasion that I buy bananas, they, too, are gone before they ever have a chance to become overripe. The food supply is shrinking almost as quickly as the woodpiles during this cold winter.

But, on the other hand, the contents of the dog food bag decreases very slowly. Blue and Kate have developed a distinct taste for “people food,” and they are not fussy about what it is.

We have never been strict about dogs not begging. And, our border collies of the past also got their share of table food. But, Blue and Kate have taken the art to a new level. Perhaps, this is because there are two of them, so there is a natural competition for food. And, for sure, if one gets something “special,” the other one is sure that she, too, will be the recipient of the same generosity.

In the morning, there are two heads on my lap, one pressing down as firmly as she can—Kate—and the other, more lightly, while she also leans her entire body against my leg. That is Blue’s method. They usually receive some bits of toasted homemade rye bread, most often buttered and topped with jam, cheese, or apple butter. Any leftover toast is handed out when we are finished. Usually disappointed in the volume of breakfast with us, they go to their dishes and top off their gleanings with a few bites of dry kibble.

At noon, though, when we eat the main meal of our day, Kate and Blue are ready and willing to claim their share of dinner. This is when it is crucial that I cook for four instead of two. We usually eat potatoes in one form or another at noon, though on occasion, the main dish is some kind of pasta, rice, or other grain. When I go to the root cellar to get potatoes for dinner, I now know enough to bring up twice as many as we would eat. Meat, vegetables—the same theory applies. In fact, I think Blue and Kate would be perfectly happy if I cooked just for them, leaving our own plates bare.

They do have to wait, though, until we are finished. Then, the leftover potatoes, vegetables, meat, and juice from cooking are divided, and each of them gets her own dish. Because Kate can easily be intimidated by no more than a look from Blue—though this doesn’t seem to apply when it concerns their dog food dishes—one dinner is placed at least ten feet from the other.

We often wonder if we will find foods that they don’t like. The only thing that has not pleased them so far has been rhubarb sauce. I suspect if it were mixed with more desirable fare, it, too, would go down just fine. I thought sauerkraut would be rejected, but no—they loved that, perhaps because it had been cooked with small pieces of pork.

Kate gobbles. Her dish is licked clean before Blue has even half of hers gone. And Blue is messy. There is food on the floor on all sides when her dish is empty. But, to her credit, she then licks up every morsel that she had spilled on the floor. And, if she does miss a bit, Kate will check it all out after Blue is finished. At the same time, Blue will go to Kate's dish and give it a lick, even though there will be absolutely nothing left.

Oddly enough, after the dogs have finished, Raymond the Siamese cat will lick each dish carefully. There can't be even a taste remaining, but he makes sure.

I think that the crops we raise to sustain ourselves are perfectly acceptable food for dogs. Blue and Kate are shiny, healthy, and happy. I would rather plant more potatoes than buy more kibble. And, it's rather interesting to see just how they savor vegetables and many fruits as well as meat and bread. I don't mind cooking for four, even though, when a dish is a little sparse, I have to remind us to leave something for the dogs.

