

I thought off and on all day yesterday—Easter Sunday—about what I might write for our website for Earth Day, today, April 22nd. I still had not decided on a topic this morning, but with our barn chores and lamb feeding, I had little time to contemplate.

I needed to go to our unheated greenhouse to dig the last of the parsnips, and I knew there was a lot of work there to get ready for this summer's growing season since I had not finished cleaning the beds last fall. When I got to the garden, it was not long before I realized that this Earth Day column would nearly write itself.

What better way to spend as much time as possible on Earth Day than with dirt under my fingernails and the good smell of damp soil and the heady perfume of last year's basil plants, now standing dry and brown, but still releasing their spicy aroma.

So, I dug the parsnips, not an easy job, since they had become large and solidly anchored in the soft soil of the greenhouse. Then, I began cleaning beds. As I did, I thought a little about why we humans often show so little respect for the Earth.

If one lives a life in—depending on conditions—an air-conditioned or heated house, then moves to an similarly air-conditioned or heated automobile and on to work in a building with the same characteristics, there is precious little connection to Mother Earth. And with that air conditioning in the car, along with a radio, telephone, and other devices, bird song is seldom heard, rain on the windshield is only annoyance, and life in this bubble bears little resemblance to the planet that sustains us. A two week vacation “in nature” isn't enough to nurture us or endow us with humility.

It is different in a garden. As soon as those small lettuce seeds are planted, there is anticipation of the salad that will result. The tiny green spears of garlic that are appearing now promise delicious meals later in the summer. And the knowledge that the ice and snow of winter have fled, that the brown, mulched earth will soon bear rows and beds of many shades of green, ensuring meals for us for another year—this realization makes Earth Day a real holiday we need to celebrate with all the reverence that many give to their religious observances.

In addition to cleaning greenhouse beds and digging the parsnips, I took a tour around the April garden, as well. I saw a lot of labor—but pleasant work—ahead. The fall raspberry plants need cutting, there are still canes on the summer berries to remove, and the strawberries need some mulch. Then, I looked at our new fruit trees. We have wondered about their ability to survive our cold winters—minus 27 F. on a couple of days this past season—so, I looked for live buds. It appears that all of the apple trees, the cold-hardy peach and apricot trees, and the plums have made it through the winter months.

It was warm in the greenhouse, and I was dripping with sweat when I headed for the cabin. Once inside the house, I took a quick look at dinner preparations that I had started before heading to the garden. I saw that my celebration of Earth Day took place not only in the garden, but in the kitchen, as well. I had cooked chicken drumsticks this morning—from chickens we had

raised last summer, birds that were free-ranging on grass, weeds, and bugs around the farm yard. The broth from that chicken was fragrant, and the fat was bright yellow from the greens the poultry had eaten. I had a package of mixed vegetables that I froze last summer now waiting to be cooked. Satina potatoes from the garden were peeled and standing in cold water, ready to be boiled. And, now, there would be parsnips, as well. And tomorrow's dinner was in the slow cooker—Swedish brown beans with a little piece of smoked pork from a pig we had raised last summer. A splash of vinegar and a good dousing of maple syrup will turn that bounty of last season into a delicious soup.

It is not difficult, if one spends a little time growing food, to see that all of our actions have an effect on the earth, good and/or bad. On this Earth Day, one thing that many people could do is to plan to raise even a small vegetable garden. Putting food on the table that one has raised at home is a powerful statement about the connection we have to our planet. It is my hope that more people will give it a try.