

I just came in from the garden. The spring has brought plenty of moisture, and it is later than usual for some planting. Potatoes and other crops that either take some time to come up or that can tolerate a frost are most often in the ground with green shoots emerging by now.

I don't like planting garden. I should. Most of our food supply for both the growing season and the winter is embodied in the tiny seeds I am sowing today. Year after year, we scratch up the garden soil and plant the seeds, and I never believe they will come up or make anything we can later consume.

They always do. Not a winter has gone by during the decades we have been growing our own vegetables and berries but what we have come into spring with enough food to last until the new crops begin producing.

Henry David Thoreau wrote: "Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

But, I have no faith in a seed. Only the memory of past seasons' bounty keeps me on my hands and knees, dirt under my fingernails, sun in my eyes, in the faint hope that we will have food for another long, cold season.

Except for planting time, I like working in the garden. I don't mind cleaning away the weeds and grass, mulching, hoeing, even picking off Colorado potato beetles that are intent on keeping us from having a good supply of our most staple food—the potato.

And, harvesting, especially of root crops, is like a treasure hunt. Each time I dig a forkful of carrots from the ground, I look eagerly to see how fine the bright orange roots are. And under the potato plants I am certain to find especially beautiful specimens—large, smooth tubers that promise nearly daily winter meals.

The tomato seeds I sowed in small containers in March are large and healthy now, and though, in our part of the world, we have to wait months for the fruit to develop and ripen, we find the wait well worth it. Fresh tomatoes for a couple of months are a real treat, but the jars of sauce, juice, and salsa are invaluable during the winter. But, back in March, I was almost certain those seeds would never come up.

The garden this time of year has a forest of marking sticks showing us where we have planted, where the "alleys" we use for walking are, and what is under the soil in each bed. Nothing here looks like "food" to me.

And yet, I know that by the end of June, the garden will look like it has potential to feed us. Even here where USDA zoning says we are "5," zone 4 plants are not always reliable. We are not unaccustomed to very cold winter weather or to frosty nights any month of the year. We expect July to be reliable, but it has failed us sometimes, too. And June and August are as likely as not to have frost. The garden still produces food in spite of it all.

So, once again, I have sown and planted, marked and recorded, and made vegetable bed after bed that will undoubtedly—in spite of my lack of belief—provide us with another season's sustenance. And, with the sun shining and a nice breeze to keep me cool, I put those seeds in the ground. Sometimes, a person does not need faith to get results.

