

We are working every day on the “first pass” through the garden as seeds and tubers come up. This is probably the hardest gardening of the year, because it starts with a more or less blank slate, an expanse of garden beds with the markers we use that tell us where the plants will emerge and what they will be. And, although Thoreau wrote a book called *Faith in a Seed*, I have none. After decades of gardening, I still have no strong belief that anything will actually come up. And yet, those little seeds do germinate and become the vegetables we will use year round.

Runo looked at the bare expanse as we finished planting and remarked that it surely didn't look like what it is—our sustenance for the year ahead. In this time of pandemic it seems even more vital to depend on our own resources as much as we can. That does not mean we never buy anything. But, what we can raise ourselves, we do. And we avoid a lot of purchased food on other ethical grounds—how far it has to travel to reach us, how it is grown, whether workers have been exploited in its production. It is always more satisfying to sit down at the table and consume a meal that grew only a few hundred meters from our cabin. If we bought no food at all, we would still not starve.

So, the garden is important to us, and as the season progresses, it also becomes more and more beautiful. We plant in short beds, so most of the garden provides a varied scene. A bed of red cabbage may be next to a potato bed. Beets might have peas for near neighbors. And onion beds are scattered through the garden. We use onions nearly every day. And sunflowers brighten spots through the plot.

This time of year, though, when a lot of our garden—not early by most standards—is just coming up, the loveliest sight is the long row of garlic beds. Planted last fall, the tall, sturdy blue-green plants fill their beds and are just about to send up the curly-stalked scapes. In another month or so the garlic will be ready to pull and store for fall and winter.

As the garden grows and matures, we will look down the rows of beds and calculate how much of this and that we will need to have for winter meals. If dry beans do not do well this year, we know that we had an abundance last year and that they are still perfectly good. If winter squash is plentiful and delicious, I will be sure to freeze a few more packages than last year, as I see that basket in the freezer is nearly empty. And if the potato crop is not the best, we should still be okay, since we planted far more potatoes than we can use if the crop is average.

Vegetable gardening is a guessing game to some extent, but after many years, educated guesses help determine how much to plant, when to start seeds inside, what varieties will do best, and how much we will need. As important as the foods are, having plenty of can lids and freezer containers is nearly as vital for us to be successful in supplying ourselves with food during the cold months.

As for now, that “blank slate” is filling with tiny beets and carrots, green beans, the dark green curls of new potato plants, the spears of sweet corn and our heritage Painted Mountain grinding corn. Three kinds of cabbage, two varieties of broccoli, and brussel sprouts and cauliflower grow in beds

scattered through the garden. Each season has its special set of challenges, and not everything will be a success every summer. But, with some diligent labor and a little luck, we will have enough to eat over another winter.