

We don't always plan very effectively for the future. But, this time of year, when the garden has been "put by," and the predominant color in our environment is no longer green, it does pay to think ahead once in a while.

That is true in the case of garlic. It seems strange in our climate to plant these small, tender cloves of that most aromatic garden crop just as the growing season is over. But, late October is garlic planting time.

We have sometimes been asked what variety of garlic we grow. We can't really say. It has been planted year after year here at Coe Creek for so long now that its origins have been obscured by the mists of time.

It was probably close to forty years ago that we decided to order a small amount of seed garlic and give it a try. It worked out pretty well, so we kept our seed for the following year, and decade after decade this garlic—whatever it might have been called—has served us well.

Runo is the garlic grower. I usually help cut scapes and pull the ripe bulbs in August, and I certainly use a lot of it in cooking, but preparing, planting, and mulching the garlic beds is Runo's project. And it has consistently been a success.

Planted in the cold soil of fall, the garlic beds are heavily mulched and left alone for the winter.

When spring comes, we are always anxious to see the first green shoots emerge from those cloves that had spent the winter in the good black garden dirt blanketed with straw. And, they come up early, another sign of a growing season to come.

Our stored garlic usually keeps well enough until we can harvest something from the new crop. Scapes come first. If left to flower and go to seed, next year's garden will be thick with garlic grass. But, cut just as they begin to curl their stems and flower, scapes are a delicious ingredient to add to many summer dishes. And, they come just at the right time, when last season's crop has been depleted or is no longer firm and juicy.

When we pull garlic for the main harvest, we always try it out as soon as possible. New garlic is very juicy and almost crisp and has a nice, spicy but still mild, flavor that adds a new dimension of flavor to many of the foods we commonly have on our tables.

Sometimes, the simplest dishes, good old standbys, are brought to a higher level of flavor by adding some garlic. Mashed potatoes are a good example. Some people I know assert that adding anything but milk and butter to mashed potatoes is heresy. I skip the milk, but a good chunk of butter certainly enhances the flavor of this staple vegetable. It seems just about perfect until the cook throws a few cloves of garlic into the potato cooking water. The garlic softens and disappears in the mashing process, but the flavor remains. Garlic mashed potatoes—still with that chunk of butter—are fit delicacies for the most noble of us.

So, at the same time that we are winding down for the season, beginning to use our stored food supplies in the root cellar, fruit shelves, and freezers, we are planning ahead for 2021. And if all goes well, there will be beds of fresh green-stalked garlic growing to supply our needs.