

The leaves seem to be nearly fully out on the trees now, the days have become warm, and we need rain. And, the garden is mostly planted.

It is a big job. Probably, most people would say that we have made it a much bigger piece of labor than necessary. Do two people really need more than forty tomato plants? Would a few less hills of potatoes mean that we would not have enough for the next season? And, how many kinds of dry beans do we really need to raise?

I suppose these are legitimate questions, and answering them in a different way than we have would certainly result in less labor. Our garden gives us work planting, hoeing and weeding, picking, canning, freezing, root cellaring, and drying—tasks that begin with planting tomato and pepper seeds in March and don't end until late in the fall, when the last crop has been harvested and with chilly fingers Runo pokes in the cloves that will be the beginning of next year's garlic. There is really no time of year when the garden is completely out of our thoughts.

The frosts last week did their damage in spite of our covering plants. The tomatoes fared okay, but some of the peppers and eggplant seedlings were frosted. And my imprudent planting of marigolds along the path to the greenhouse resulted in blackened flower plants. But, those things are minor. We have had enough gardens over the years to more or less expect a cold spell at the end of May or beginning of June. And, we know that no two seasons are alike. Some crops flourish one year and are disappointing the next season, even when weather and other circumstances seem to be similar.

It is fun to go to the garden now each day to see what has emerged from the soil. Relocating and rebuilding the little greenhouse resulted in some hard ground where we had walked while doing the construction. A bed of Tiger Eyes dry beans, lovely warm, brown legumes with streaks of rusty red, had one stretch with no plants in sight though the rest of the bed was up. But, after looking at the cracking in the soil yesterday in the area where we had compacted the bed by walking on it, I was not surprised to see that those hardy beans had pushed through to the surface today. We hope they will grow well and produce a good crop for next winter's soups and baked dishes.

We forgot to cover a bed of early potatoes—ones we planted more than a month ago—and they were black and wilted in the 24F. morning during this chilly spell. But, today, I saw tiny green leaves appearing at the base of the plants. I guess they, too, have survived the frost.

The last planting we did was our "hill crops" of various squashes, zucchinis, and melons and cucumbers. This was the most delicate and careful job because of our concern for the other occupant of our garden. As usual, a killdeer has a nest in the garden. We left her a large area that we avoid carefully, but she still flutters off the four eggs and lures us away from that part of the garden. Last year, she had her nest under a rhubarb leaf, and that seemed a lot more sensible. But, she must have her reasons.

We won't have strawberries to pick this year, but we did plant a hundred new plants, so, if we take good care of them, we should have berries again next year. The fall raspberries are growing, so we have hopes for a good crop again

this late summer and fall.

Gardening is a lot of work, although some people have methods that are a lot less labor intensive than ours. But, there is no more pleasant job with such a reward as the vegetables grow, flower, produce, and eventually make their appearance on our dinner table.