

Priorities change rapidly sometimes. It seems like our gardening is focused one day on mulching and weeding between the beds, and the next day, all that is put aside, because harvest time is here. And, when there is food to freeze, can, dry, ferment, or root cellar, that becomes not only the most important job but also the only one.

That is not, of course, wholly true. Other tasks on the farm are necessary, too—everything from milking the cows we keep in a separate pasture close to the barn so we will have dairy foods for our own use to moving sheep from one pasture to another and filling the mineral feeders for both sheep and beef cattle. But, in the garden, harvesting is our main job.

In fact, if there isn't some food product to change from garden fresh to winter storage every day, I don't quite know what to do with myself.

Today, I froze green beans. I snipped off the ends, blanched them, and then chilled them in cold water. Ten meal-sized bags went to the freezer this time. I had already taken some of the beans for "dilly beans," a tasty pickled bean with garlic, dill, and hot peppers. Six pint jars are cooling on the kitchen cupboard now.

I also brought in some red sweet peppers. I roasted them until their skins blistered, then peeled them and cut them into strips. Two jam jars, peppers in olive oil just now took up their place in the freezer.

Variety is especially important if one is to go through a winter without buying vegetables and other foods grown far from where we live. If we can enjoy meals of substance that are full of color and flavor from all kinds of foods we grow ourselves, we are much less likely to succumb to the temptation to purchase something we did not plant and harvest ourselves.

It is much more fun to "shop" for our meals in the garden than at a supermarket. We need not wonder if what we buy is fresh. As we break a patty pan squash from the vine, dig a hill of potatoes, pick a raspberry, or gently tug a vine-ripened tomato from its moorings, we are pretty sure we won't find that degree of freshness at the store. And because we grow our food organically, we think it probably tastes better, too. Or, if not, at least we don't have visions of the poisons that are used on commercial products.

"Products" seems an appropriate word for the vegetables and fruits, meats and dairy food, of "Big Ag." It sounds more like what a factory brings forth instead of what a farm grows. And, of course, that is the issue. Our farms, getting bigger and bigger, more and more impersonal, are now factories. Even a small garden can give its caretaker a burst of pleasure and many delicious meals.

There are, of course, those Japanese beetles I mentioned last week. And yesterday, the tomato hornworm made its appearance in an unmistakable way. We had been watching for them, and a few days after spotting the first one—a small specimen—they came out in full force yesterday. We picked off 21, mostly large ones. I did a quick walk-through in the tomato rows today and found eight.

But, Colorado potato beetle damage has abated, so I have time to deal with this next influx of pests. And while I scour the garden for these unwanted

occupants, I can imagine all the interesting and delicious foods we will be able to put on our table this coming winter.

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Books to read:

*The Premonition*, "A Pandemic Story," by Michael Lewis. 5 stars from me