

We have had beautiful cabbage this year in spite of our early season problem with woodchucks. After relocating a number of the foraging animals to areas without any vegetable gardens, our cabbage plants all came back, putting out new leaves and eventually making heads. We made some sauerkraut—small batches of curtido (a spicy Latin American version;) lemon/dill; and leek/black pepper—all, of course, mainly cabbage. The red cabbage is ready now, too, and although most of it is destined for sweet/sour cabbage with apples, red onions, and bacon, we will probably make at least one gallon jar of red sauerkraut.

That topic, though, led me to another recollection. My mother told this story many years ago. When she was a young girl, she had worked hard picking up potatoes and herding cows for the neighbors and had saved enough money for a new coat. It was a lovely coat of light brown wool with a dark brown fur collar. Because she had earned the money herself, she was even prouder of her new coat than she might otherwise have been.

It was a chilly day in the fall when her mother started preparing to make the family's supply of sauerkraut. She gave Frances the task of going to the neighbor's and borrowing the sauerkraut cutter.

My mother begged to wear her new coat. It was a cold day, and she wanted to cozy up inside that new garment. My grandmother relented.

Frances borrowed the sauerkraut cutter from the old gentleman who lived nearby. He retrieved it from another room, from under his bed, some said. After thanking the neighbor, she hurried home, the unwieldy tool under her arm.

My grandmother prepared to wash and scald the cutter when she saw that it was loaded with bedbugs. Through the door she went, and she scrubbed the sauerkraut cutter at the outside pump, killing any of the bugs that were still alive. She took it back to the kitchen, scoured it with soap and water, and emptied her big boiling teakettle over the utensil.

Then, she dealt with my mother's coat. They went over that coat inch by inch and then hung it out in the fresh, cold air for several days. Not satisfied, Grandma sent the coat to the Dry Cleaner, just to make sure.

The possibility of a bedbug infestation was a horror in people's minds, and in recent years, it appears they have again become a problem, sometimes in "high class" hotels. In the past, some people believed they were harbored in hemlock wood; others thought unsanitary conditions "must" have something to do with it. Whatever the reason, my grandmother had dealt promptly with it, and long before serious cold weather set in, Frances was wearing her coat, and the sauerkraut was ready to eat. Grandma's assessment of bedbugs was this: it was no shame to get them, but it was a shame to keep them.