

We had our first real frost last night. This is, as everyone in this area knows, much later than the usual end of the growing season. Over the years that has come as early as mid-August, but most commonly in early September. But, that was before we humans messed up the climate so badly. These days, we have no idea what to expect.

So, with temperatures that fell into the mid twenties last night, the cookstove fire felt good this morning. And, where there is fire, there is, in this cabin, at least, cooking. I see no reason for using the electric stove if there is a fire in the old Monarch cook stove.

One of my uncles used to say that baked beans and pumpkin pie were two of his favorites that never tasted right if they hadn't been baked in the oven of a wood burning cookstove.

Today there is soup simmering on the stove. I had taken beef shank bones with lots of meat on them from the freezer last evening. This morning, after the cookstove was heated up—evidenced by the singing of the big teakettle that stands there winter and summer—I drizzled a little olive oil in a large kettle and lay the shanks there. They browned while we ate our breakfast, and by the time we went to the barn to do our morning chores, the soup bones were ready for water and a long, slow simmer.

When I left the barn with the jar of morning cream and a pail of skim milk for cottage cheese, I detoured through the garden. Our vegetable plot has been beautiful all summer, and now, after most beds have been harvested, the bright green rye cover crop has made a brilliant picture. The crops that are left are, for the most part, those that don't much care if it freezes—cabbage, leeks, carrots, beets. And, we will harvest most of them soon. The flowers that lined the path to the greenhouse are only a memory after last night's temperatures, and peppers and eggplants that had survived all summer have met their end. So, I picked or pulled the soup ingredients I needed—one huge leek, two carrots, some leaves of kale, and a handful of celery stems. Along with potatoes and garlic that we harvested some time ago, we had the makings for a good kettle of soup.

As soup begins to appear on the table more and more often this time of year, salads' importance decline. We still have salads, but they are of a different kind than the lettuce dominated creations of summer and the tomato-centric late summer/fall salads. Now,

instead, we turn to root vegetables. Roasted beets make delicious salads when accented by feta cheese, red onions, and herbs. And cabbage has wonderful quality now and is very plentiful. Red cabbage, in particular, lends itself to salads that include apples and red onions. We have many varieties of potatoes, too, and dry beans are in the pantry and ready for use, as well.

So, the hard frost has eliminated some vegetables from our menus, but has also brought others to the forefront. And, as the season progresses, so do our meals, leading us from the light fare of summer to the foods that sustain us during the cold seasons. We were more than ready for this first hard frost.