

Tomatoes, sweet corn, tomatoes, fall raspberries, carrots, tomatoes, potatoes, tomatoes again, beans, apples, carrots, and more tomatoes. Soon there will be dry beans, squash, beets, and more potatoes. And, if we don't have a killing frost, yet more tomatoes.

It has not been a wet summer by any means, but with the abundant organic matter in our garden soil, the vegetables have flourished. We have not watered the garden all year, except for the new apple trees and plants in the little greenhouse that have no other source of moisture. We mulch heavily, and that helps, too. We generally keep the garden pretty clean of weeds until the middle of the summer, and then, when harvesting begins to take up our time, the weeds tend to grow healthily, too. The vegetable plants can usually handle the competition by that time. It might not look as pretty, but it is healthy and very productive—no chemical sprays, no pesticides, no herbicides, no insecticides, and no artificial fertilizers.

For the last two or three years, we have been bothered in late summer by Japanese beetles, though. Mostly, they don't damage plants enough to interfere with the vegetables, but they do seem to love beans, and, much more disturbing, they love raspberry leaves.

We have just a small plot of fall raspberry plants, the kind that produce on first year canes. They begin to ripen in mid to late August—just now, we are picking a pint a day. That will increase to no more than a quart or so, but if I pick berries every day, there will be more than enough for our winter supply of frozen berries and raspberry jam. The bushes will continue to bear until we have a very hard frost.

So, every afternoon, before I pick the raspberries, I go around the bushes with another container that held yogurt when it was new. I partly fill it with water before circling the patch. I brush the beetles into the water. When I have completed the circuit, I dump them out on a hard surface and crush them with my foot. I gather between a hundred and two hundred Japanese beetles every afternoon, and I don't bother with anything but the raspberry plants, though I see the insects in other places, too.

Some people use the traps that attract the beetles away from the vulnerable crops. I have read mixed reports on that method. While some say that they have good luck with this, others believe that the traps attract the beetles from more distant areas so that

there are just more in the vicinity of one's crops. We will try to get reliable information on that before another season, since the beetles are becoming more numerous every year.

But, we have a lot of food in our garden—both fresh vegetables for this time of year and a great variety and amount to freeze, can, root cellar, and dry for winter use.

I wait all May and June for new potatoes and rely on having enough by the 4th of July so that I can begin to “steal” one or two from under each of the early plants. We have been eating potatoes regularly since that time. Yesterday, I dug those four beds of Onaways and wondered if i'd find some hills with no potatoes at all, since there had been so much larceny since early July. I did find a few plants with only two or three mature potatoes, these from the first row I had been plundering. Most of them, though, still had at least eight big tubers. There was a bushel and a half from those four short beds.

And, I wait even longer for that first cucumber, crisp and green, that I peel and slice into a small bowl with a little vinegar, salt, and pepper.

And, then, finally, tomatoes begin to ripen. I would never consider buying a tomato. These fruits we treat as vegetables aren't meant to be transported long distances, and the varieties we raise wouldn't stand up for that. We never tire of the juicy, red tomatoes from our own garden soil. Our standard breakfast from August to October consists of homemade whole grain bread, toasted, with home churned yellow butter and sliced tomatoes sprinkled with a little salt. Every summer, the prospect of this breakfast menu makes me appreciate that first meal of the day all over again.

So, almost every day now, I steam tomatoes, can sauce, or make juice. And the fresh slices are on the table at every meal.

As the gardening season for the perishable crops winds down, we will turn to pulling onions, cleaning and topping garlic, digging the main crop of potatoes, and harvesting squash. And then, by the time we can expect cold weather and snow, the harvest will be in storage, and we can settle in for a few months of “winter farming,” as my dad called it, when farmers and gardeners finish harvesting one day and immediately begin looking forward to the next spring.