Farm to Table Through the Year

12 Months of Fresh Food from the Garden

A Community Book Compiled by The Backyard Farming Connection

Farm to Table Through the Year

12 Months of Fresh Food from the Garden

* * *

Any opinions expressed here are strictly those of the contributors.

Thank you to all those who shared their time and expertise on these pages, and for those who believe in fresh food from the garden.

A Community book compiled by The Backyard Farming Connection

Table of Contents

Contributing Authors

January :: Cabbage:: Angi Schneider

Angi is a pastor's wife and mom to six from South Texas. She and her family enjoy many homesteading interests including gardening and keeping bees and chickens. She documents these adventures on her blog, SchneiderPeeps.

February :: Cold Frame Gardening:: Rob Terry

Rob is a self-employed architectural designer, furniture maker, amateur photographer, and backyard farmer. Rob, his wife and his children are all vegetarians so growing organic vegetables is very important. Rob and his family are attempting to grow as much of their own food as possible on their ¼ acre suburban lot and are working towards owning a small organic farm in the near future. Winter growing has been an important part of their gardening because it supplies them with fresh greens year round. Rob blogs about his gardening experiences at Bepa's Garden where he shares tips and techniques about organic gardening, seed saving and garden project plans.

March :: Fresh Eggs :: Lisa Steele

Lisa writes the chicken-themed blog Fresh Eggs Daily which focuses on raising backyard chickens and ducks as naturally as possible. She shares ways to ensure your hens are happy and healthy, including craft ideas, DIY projects and of course recipes using all farm fresh eggs.

April :: Guinea Eggs :: Tammy Barani

Tammy lives with her husband David and blogs at Our Neck of the Woods. They chronicle their successes and mistakes on their quest for self-sufficiency. After living in the city their whole lives, they moved to a 20-acre wooded homestead in May of 2011 and have never been happier. They typically blog about gardening, food, chickens, guineas, and anything else that inspires and motivates them on their journey.

May :: Seed Starting and Rhubarb :: Lisa Lynn

Lisa has been a gardener and a homesteader of sorts her whole life. Even living in a subdivision for many years didn't slow her down much. Her vegetable garden took over the whole yard, fruit trees lined their property, and she raised meat rabbits and butchered them herself. Their kitchen was turned into a sauna every summer as she canned jams, fruits, and vegetables, but it never seemed like enough. So her family moved to a one acre agricultural property in 2010 and she dove in head first. Now they have their own chickens for meat and eggs, fruit trees, and a large vegetable garden. Every year she's added to her homesteading skills and she loves to share her experience on her blog: The Self Sufficient HomeAcre. Encouraging others to try these old world skills gives her a great sense of purpose.

June :: Ground Cherries :: Gretchen Stuppy Carlson

Gretchen lives in upstate NY with her three young children and husband on an emerging 2 1/2 acre backyard farm. Like so many people, they are making the move to live closer to the earth, to think about where their food and belongings come from, to regain homesteading skills, and to strengthen the family connection through farming. You can follow along with her at The Backyard Farming Connection or Simple and Joyful Living.

July: Farmers Markets and Canning:: Katie Driscoll

Katie grew up in a Christ-centered home with tender, loving, grace-filled parents. She loves life's simple pleasures, like ducks and chickens, gardening and gathering. She's not a professional author or photographer, but she is a picture-taker/story-teller. That's why she started blogging. She and her husband enjoy the creative challenge of turning trash into treasure and designing and making furniture in a primitive or distressed style. They are DIYers who enjoy sharing their ideas and being inspired by the ideas of others. Maple Grove is their homestead in Southwestern Pennsylvania. God has so incredibly blessed her with a loving husband, children, and grandchildren. She prays she is able to use the gifts He gave her to give Him glory and be a blessing to others.

August :: Tomatoes :: Jennifer Burcke

Jennifer began her love affair with heirloom tomatoes in 2007. She was drawn in by a beautiful slicing tomato named after Julia Child. She loved the thought of growing a tomato in her garden that bore the name of her culinary idol. Jennifer learned to cook by watching Julia's shows on PBS every day after school. While most children were watching cartoons, she was taking notes and watching Julia hold court in her kitchen. It seemed natural that Jennifer would want to grow a tomato that she had handpicked to be her namesake. You can read more from Jennifer at 1840 Farm.

September :: Beets :: Kim Corrigan-Oliver

Kim Corrigan-Oliver is a mom, holistic nutritionist, birth doula and writer. She lives in Ontario, Canada on a little piece of land where she and her family grow their own food, raise chickens and get ready to welcome some bees. They strive to live simply, in tune

with the seasons, close to the earth and each other. She shares her mothering journey at Mothering with Mindfulness, giving readers a glimpse into life with her little man, as they explore the world around them and all it has to offer.

October :: Pumpkins :: Sheryl

Sheryl Thompson is a mother, grandmother, artist, gardener, avid crafter, and homemaker. She and her husband, Bill I live on a small "farmette" in a tiny town called Sherman, Maine. Sherman is in the heart of logging and potato country, about 90 miles north of Bangor. Small (population of 450) and remote but incredibly beautiful , Sherman has picturesque views of Mount Katahdin, the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, about 20 miles to our west. Their little "piece of heaven" has an incredible view of the mountain and all the rest of Baxter State Park from our front porch. They live on 60 acres of rugged but beautiful woods and fields with our dog, Spirit, and our two cats Chucky and CJ, and a couple of dozen Buff Orpington chickens. You can find Sheryl at: The Wilderness Wife.

November :: Acorn Squash :: Christine Cassella

Christine is an ever-evolving collection of adjectives, but currently describes herself as a biologist, permaculturist, herbalist, and urban homesteader. She is someone who likes to live with the Earth in mind - both to protect the Earth for the benefit of future generations, and as a reflection of spirit. She blogs about finding spirit in nature, urban homesteading, and other topics related to green living and sustainability at: These Light Footsteps.

December :: Jerusalem Artichokes :: Teresa Arsenault

The Radishgirl Thymes' blog is "Simply Living Life", on their property. They try to use the property to its fullest. The have a huge garden and grow everything organic. They raise chickens for eggs. The firewood is from the property. Teresa enjoys cooking, baking, knitting, raising chickens and tending to the garden. She also likes to make lip balms, lotions and tinctures.

Introduction

What is it that makes food taste better when it comes from your garden? When we started growing food in our own backyard with the purpose of preparing delicious meals, suddenly our focus shifted from wanting to grow the biggest pumpkin in the neighborhood to planting heirloom varieties with quirky names, interesting histories, and a truly delicious taste. How can you see seeds with a name like "Aunt Ruby's German Green" tomato and not want to plant a few? We had limited yields from a "Cherokee Purple" tomato, but the flavor and color of the few we got was worth every wheelbarrow full of compost and topsoil we hauled last spring.

Discovering new favors in familiar foods is part of what enriches the Farm to Table movement, but the movement is about more than just the ingredients. In preparing a meal, you're less likely to overcook or burn a zucchini you've grown from seed compared to one you grabbed at the grocery store. This extra care will preserve the flavor that distinguishes your farm fresh prize from the rank and file hot-house varieties. When our Cherokee Purple tomatoes ripened, we didn't just eat dinner, we invited over some good friends, set up a table in the backyard and shared the experience. It all starts by connecting with the food you're growing and broadens into rediscovering of the joy of cooking and creating a meal.

Each chapter in this book represents one month of the year, and shares ideas on growing and preparing food through the seasons. It celebrates the tomato in August, delights in the abundance of squash in the fall, and marvels at raising seeds in the spring. The wonderful, knowledgeable authors share their own experiences with you on these pages. I invite you to get to know each of them on their own blogs, and follow along with us at the Backyard Farming Connection.

January :: Cabbage

Cabbage seems to be one of those vegetables that people either love or hate. Occasionally, someone can go from hating to loving it. When my youngest son was 7 he was very excited when we harvested our first head of cabbage for the season. When I asked, "I thought you didn't like cabbage?" He replied with, "I didn't but you made me eat it so much I do now."

Growing cabbage

Cabbage is part of the brassica family, (formerly called cruciferae) along with broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower and turnips. Less familiar brassicas include broccoli raab, collards, cress, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, and bok choi. All of these are grown very similarly.

Tips for growing cabbage

- Cabbage likes cool weather so it will be one of the first plants to plant.
- Plant 18" apart - cabbage can get pretty big
- Unless you're planning on canning the cabbage for, say, sauerkraut (yum) or plan on freezing it (yuck) you should think about succession planting. Start early in your planting time and then plant a few every two weeks. That way you can harvest the large heads and have smaller ones still growing.
- You can either direct sow the seeds or start in packs and transplant.
- Plant with lots of compost and top dress mid-season.
- Cabbage likes cool weather so when it starts to warm up (upper 80's) it will get bitter

Problems and pests

For the most part cabbage is pretty easy to grow. Try not to get compost or dirt down into the head. Water the dirt (without splashing) not the plant.

Caterpillars (cabbage loopers) do like cabbage and you can us bt (sold under the name Dipel Dust) to get rid of them. Bt won't hurt people or plants or any other insect, just caterpillars.

Harvesting and storing

- Harvest any time after the head has formed.
- Store in a cold cellar
- In mild climates you can just leave them growing in the ground all winter

Recipe: Rainbow Slaw

Cabbage is one of those versatile vegetables that can be eaten either cooked or raw. The secret to making great cooked cabbage is to use very little water and not boil it too much.

Our favorite way to eat cabbage is to cut it up into 1” squares, put it into a pot with about an inch of water, 3-4 tbsp butter and salt and pepper and cook over medium heat until soft but not mushy.

But that’s not a very exciting recipe so here’s a raw recipe.

Ingredients

- 2 cups shredded green cabbage
- 1 cup shredded red cabbage
- 2 grated carrots
- 1 grated beet
- 1 apple finely diced
- 2-4 tbsp olive oil
- 2-4 tbsp honey
- Optional: celery seed, red wine or apple cider vinegar.

Instructions

Mix all veggies in large bowl, drizzle with olive oil and honey (a sprinkle of celery seed and a couple of tsp of vinegar if desired). Toss to mix. Let sit in refrigerator for several hours before serving.

Angi Schneider

Angi is a pastor's wife and mom to six from South Texas. She and her family enjoy many homesteading interests including gardening and keeping bees and chickens. She documents these adventures on her blog, SchneiderPeeps.

February :: Winter Gardening

Growing Winter Crops

Most people think the growing season has to come to an end when the weather turns colder, but that doesn't have to be the case. With a little careful planning and the use of simple cold frames you can easily grow lettuce, kale and other greens all winter long.

At the end of this chapter are plans for an easy to build cold frame (mini-greenhouse) that you can build yourself.

Winter growing is something I started to do several years ago after reading Eliot Coleman's book "Four-Season Harvest". I was intrigued by how he was able to grow several different types of leafy greens all winter on his farm in Maine using unheated high tunnels and cold frames. I live in New England and the thought of walking outside in the snow and harvesting fresh lettuce, arugula, spinach, carrots and beets to make a salad in January was very appealing. I quickly learned that it is easy to grow a winter garden.

By selecting the proper varieties to grow and providing protection for the plants from snow and frost, it is possible to have fresh greens year round. It is important to start with cold hardy crops such as arugula, spinach, and lettuce and to start the plants early enough so they are well established before the cold weather hits. You will also need to use a cold frame; high tunnel or row covers to protect the plants from snow and frost. I have included plans for an easy to build cold frame that I have designed and use in my garden.

I have had success winter growing leaf lettuce, kale, leeks, onions, carrots, arugula, spinach, garlic, scallions and even sage. I usually start my plants for the winter garden at the beginning of August in soil blocks left in my greenhouse until well established, or by sowing seeds directly in the garden inside the cold frames. The seeds for cold hardy varieties will germinate better during cooler temperatures, so be sure they don't get too hot or dry out during warmer days.

The cold frame gives the plants protection from wind, cold temperatures and frost, similar to a blanket of snow covering a plant during the winter. The added bonus is that as the sun rises the cold frame will heat, warming the plants and allowing them to continue to grow and thrive in their own little micro- climate. Adding a layer of leaf mulch around the plants inside the cold frame seems to help keep ground temperatures higher allowing worms and other beneficial insects to survive. For added protection against frost I also add hoops and row covers inside the cold frame for extra protection on the extremely cold nights. The double layer of protection helps keep the temperatures under the row cover a few degrees warmer, keeps frost off the plants and prevents the ground from freezing. The row covers allow the plants to breathe while still letting in enough light for them to continue to grow so they can be left on at all times.

During the extremely cold nights, the plants may wilt and look like they have succumbed to the cold, but when the sun begins to warm the cold frame; the plants will spring back to life. The cold hardy varieties can withstand a light frost and even a light freeze and will still continue to grow when warmed up.

I have found that you don't need to water too much during the winter as the plants don't grow as quickly as they do during the spring. Adding mulch around the plants will help hold moisture in and prevent the soil from drying out too quickly.

Some crops that you can grow in your winter garden

- Arugula
- Celery
- Endive
- Leeks
- Lettuce
- Parsley
- Radish,
- Scallions
- Spinach
- Swiss chard
- Carrots
- Kohlrabi
- Mache
- Radicchio

Resources

If you are interested in learning more about winter growing I highly recommend Eliot Coleman's books, "Four Season Harvest" and "The Winter Harvest Handbook".

Cold Frame (mini-greenhouse) Plans

Rob Terry

Rob is a self-employed architectural designer, furniture maker, amateur photographer, and backyard farmer. Rob, his wife and his children are all vegetarians so growing organic vegetables is very important. Rob and his family are attempting to grow as much of their own food as possible on their ¼ acre suburban lot and are working towards owning a small organic farm in the near future. Winter growing has been an important part of their gardening because it supplies them with fresh greens year round.

Rob blogs about his gardening experiences at Bepa's Garden where he shares tips and techniques about organic gardening, seed saving and garden project plans.

July :: Fresh Eggs

Raising Fresh Eggs

The average store bought egg can be 6 weeks old by the time it gets to your supermarket from a commercial egg producer. Add to that the time that egg sits in your refrigerator before you use it, and the egg could be approaching two months old by the time you crack it open and scramble it up. Contrast that with raising your own chickens and collecting their eggs daily. An egg is rarely more than a few days old when I use it, and many times I cook with eggs laid that day. The superior quality, freshness and flavor translates into far better quality cooking and baking.

Fresh Eggs

The chicken that laid that store bought egg most likely spends its life in a tiny cage hardly larger than a sheet of copy paper, without the opportunity to enjoy any sunlight or fresh air, scratch for bugs or engage in any other normal chicken behavior. The alternate is buying cage-free eggs, which merely means the egg was laid by a hen free to roam around a poop-filled warehouse all day. Even buying organic or pasture-raised eggs doesn't guarantee freshness.

By contrast, our chickens roam a large fenced-in yard pecking in the dirt, looking for worms and bugs. They take dust baths in the sun and snooze under flowering bushes. They perch on branches and logs, watching the world go by. They eat good-quality feed, supplemented with kitchen and garden scraps. The appearance and flavor of the eggs they lay reflects the quality of their life and diet.

Of course since eggs are plentiful on our farm, we enjoy them not only for breakfast but also for dinner in the form of quiche. This is one of my favorite recipes that also uses broccoli and garlic from the garden.

Recipe: Roasted Broccoli and Garlic Quiche

Ingredients

Crust:

- 2- 1/2 Cups flour
- 2 sticks cold unsalted butter
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1/4 cup ice water

Filling:

- 8 slices bacon
- 1 Cup broccoli florets
- 3 garlic cloves
- 4 fresh eggs (chicken or duck)
- 1 Cup heavy cream
- 1/2 Cup milk
- 1-1/2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 Tablespoon flour
- Salt, pepper and nutmeg to taste

Instructions

First make the crust:

In the bowl of a food processor, process flour and butter 10 to 20 seconds. In a small bowl, lightly beat egg yolks then add the ice water. Pulse dough while slowing pouring in egg mixture just until dough holds together. Cover and chill dough for an hour and the roll out into pie plate. Bake at 450 degrees for 5 minutes. Line edge with foil and bake for another 5 minutes until crust is nearly done. Remove from oven and let cool. Turn oven temperature down to 325 degrees.

For the filling:

Meanwhile, cook the bacon until crispy in a cast iron skillet. Remove bacon and roast the broccoli florets and sliced garlic cloves in the bacon grease over high heat until crispy and browned. Chop broccoli, garlic and bacon into smallish pieces and set aside. Whisk eggs, heavy cream and milk.

Toss together the shredded cheese and flour, stir into egg mixture with the bacon and the broccoli mixture. Season with salt, pepper and nutmeg and pour into the pie shell. Bake the quiche for 40 minutes or until set. Cover the crust with foil if necessary to prevent over browning. Remove from oven and serve hot or at room temperature.

Lisa Steele

Lisa writes the chicken-themed blog Fresh Eggs Daily which focuses on raising backyard chickens and ducks as naturally as possible. She shares ways to ensure your hens are happy and healthy, including craft ideas, DIY projects and of course recipes using all our farm fresh eggs.

April :: Guinea Eggs

In our first summer living on our homestead, we realized how big of a problem ticks are in the middle of the woods. We weren't too keen on the idea of dousing ourselves with chemicals every time we walked out our back door, so we tried to find ways to solve the tick problem as naturally as possible. In David's research, he read that guineas are great at eating ticks, so we went online and ordered 15 baby guineas (known as keets). We only planned on having the guineas around to reduce the tick population, but along the way, we found that their eggs are the best we've ever eaten. With their delicious eggs I cook up "guinea toast" every time we raid a nest.

Raising Guinea Hens

Guineas are a class of fowl native to Africa that were brought to North America by the early settlers. Today people keep guineas for different reasons, but the most popular seems to be for

insect control. The first summer we put the guineas to work, we noticed a drastic decrease in the tick population.

We ordered our keets online (http://www.efowl.com) and they were shipped to us right after they hatched. Caring for keets is basically the same as caring for baby chicks. Most importantly, they need to be in a secure enclosed brooder with a heat lamp until they are fully feathered. You'll be able to tell if the keets are too hot (they all spread out away from the lamp) or too cold (they huddle together right under the lamp). I've found this is a better way to gauge the heat level they need rather than following a strict degree requirement for each week. Keets need to be fed a high protein game bird starter for the first six weeks; typically 24% protein is recommended. In addition to plenty of food, fresh water must always available. At first, it is best to put some small rocks or stones in the bottom of the waterer because keets are so tiny that they may actually drown in just a small amount of water.

When the keets outgrow their brooder, or you get tired of having them in your stinky garage, you can move them to their outside enclosure that they will recognize as home base for the

rest of their lives. We typically keep the keets indoors for up to four weeks, then move them to an enclosure outside within the main guinea coop. They need to be kept here for quite a while to make sure they will return at night to roost. If they are let out to free range too early, they may simply leave. We try to keep the keets on lockdown until they reach maturity at six months of age, then let them out to free range. Since guineas are such good foragers, they really don't need much in the way of supplemental food: however, we have found that it is a good idea to provide food at night to encourage them to come back each evening. In the winter it is advised to give them grain every once in a while (we give them what our chickens eat – 16% protein layer crumbles).

The best way to tell the males and females apart is their call. The females make a two-syllable call that sounds like "buckwheat" and the males repeatedly make a single-syllable "chi" call. We have to give you fair warning here – when guineas mature and find their voices and they are extremely loud. When they are let out to free range and everything they see is new to them, they constantly make noise. Our first flock of 15 were so loud that it was unpleasant to be outside if they were congregating close to the house. They normally outgrow this in a few months and then only make loud noises if they sense a threat. In this way, they are great watchdogs for your home. However, if you live close to others, the noise may be quite bothersome for your neighbors so keep that in mind.

The laying season of guineas varies depending on the climate, but they typically lay about one egg every day during the warmer months. Guineas like to lay many eggs in the same spot so once they find a safe location for a nest, they will usually return for several weeks with many different hens sharing the same nest. It can be hard to find their eggs, but if you observe their behavior you should be able to tell where they are laying. We have found that once we know where a nest is, we can mark all the eggs that are already in the nest when the guineas aren't looking, then revisit the nest each following day to collect the freshly laid eggs. Be sure the guineas don't see you messing around anywhere near the nest because they will abandon the location and lay their eggs elsewhere.

If you find a nest and notice that one of your guinea hens is sitting on it quite a bit, she has most likely gone "broody" and has decided to hatch out her clutch. Be very careful when approaching a guinea hen sitting on a nest as they are very protective of their eggs! If left alone, guineas are pretty good at successfully hatching out their keets. However, once the keets are up and running around, the mother doesn't do such a great job of keeping them safe. It is advised to collect the newly hatched keets and place them under a heat lamp with food and

water if you want to ensure their survival. Once again be very careful – the guinea mom will charge at you if she sees you messing with her babies!

Guinea eggs are roughly half the size of chicken eggs and are more pointy-shaped at one end and flatter at the other end. The shells are extremely hard making guinea eggs much more difficult to crack than chicken eggs. Since our guineas free range, their egg yolks are bright orange and have a rich, buttery taste. Guineas are excellent foragers, so all the grass, weeds and bugs they eat help make the eggs that much more delicious. The next time you discover a guinea nest and collect some of their delicious eggs, I recommend trying out my delicious guinea toast.

Recipe: Guinea Toast

Serves 1

Ingredients

- 3 guinea eggs (or 2 chicken eggs)
- Couple splashes of water or milk (I use Silk unsweetened soy milk)
- Butter for cooking eggs (I use dairy-free Earth Balance)
- 1 piece of bread, toasted (I like Ezekiel 4:9 sprouted whole grain bread)
- Cream cheese or goat cheese (I use dairy-free Tofutti spread)
- 1 scallion chopped (chives would work really well too)
- Salt & pepper to taste

Instructions

Heat a non-stick skillet over medium low heat.

While the skillet is heating up, break the eggs into a small bowl. Add milk, lots of salt & pepper, then scramble the eggs with a fork until the yolks are completely broken up.

Add butter to the skillet (about 1T) and wait until it melts and starts to bubble up, but don't let it get brown. Pour in the eggs and don't mess with them. I have found that instead of traditionally scrambling the eggs into small bits, it works best if I keep it in one big circle then cut to fit my bread. It's a lot easier to eat and looks better on the plate.

Let the eggs cook about 2-3 minutes until they are set. Then, using a spatula, flip over on the other side for just 30 seconds or so to finish cooking completely.

Fold or cut the eggs to fit your toast. Spread cream cheese on the toast, than add the eggs and scallions.

We hope our chapter has inspired you to raise guinea fowl on your own homestead!

Tammy Barani

Tammy lives with her husband David and blogs at Our Neck of the Woods. They chronicle their successes and mistakes on their quest for self-sufficiency. After living in the city their whole lives, they moved to a 20-acre wooded homestead in May of 2011 and have never been happier. They typically blog about gardening, food, chickens, guineas, and anything else that inspires and motivates them on their journey. Feel free to contact them with any questions or comments at tdbarani@yahoo.com.

May :: Seed Starting and Rhubarb

Seed Starting

May is such a wonderful time of year. The world is fresh and green with new leaves unfolding and birds returning from their winter vacations. Gardeners are busy purchasing seedlings and fertilizer, digging up beds, and planting their crops. This can also be the most expensive time of the year for a gardener. To cut back on spring gardening expenses, I start my own seedlings and grow perennial crops that will give me food year after year. One of my favorite perennial vegetables is rhubarb. It comes back year after year, providing a sweet tart flavor in pies, cakes, bread, and rhubarb sauce. In this chapter I will give you the information you need to start your own seedlings indoors and grow your own rhubarb. I'll also share my favorite springtime recipe for rhubarb bread.

Starting Seeds Indoors

Why would you want to start your own seedlings when it is so much easier to pick up a few flats at the nursery? For starters, you can save quite a bit of money by starting your own plants. The price of vegetable starts includes labor, materials, water, heat, fertilizer, and the greenhouses necessary for this task, not to mention transportation and a profit to the grower and the seller. You can cut down considerably on those costs, and reduce the environmental costs too, by doing it yourself. You have control over what is sprayed on the baby plants, which is very important to organic gardeners. In addition, there's a whole host of seed varieties available through seed catalogs and garden centers compared to the number of varieties of started transplants. Finding anything other than a purple eggplant in six packs each spring is a challenge. Most foodies and gardeners are interested in trying new flavors and colors rather than relying on the same old thing year after year. It's also a lot of fun to tend to your indoor garden of baby plants when the weather outside is still cold and wet. So why not order a few packets of seeds and try your hand at starting them inside?

If you've never started seedlings before, it may seem like a daunting task. It really isn't difficult, but it does take some planning and preparation. The most important keys to success are starting with viable seeds, a sterile growing medium, proper lighting…and a little bit of planning.

What kind of seeds should you start?

First of all, choose crops that you enjoy eating. There's little sense in growing food you won't eat. After purchasing seeds for veggies you like, determine which ones to start indoors and which ones to direct seed in the garden. Many vegetable crops grow quickly enough to direct seed while others don't transplant well. Crops that do best planted directly in the garden include many of the root vegetables, such as turnips, rutabagas, carrots, beets, parsnips, salsify, and radishes. Storage onions are the exception, unless you start with onion sets rather than seeds. Pumpkins, squash, gourds, melons, lettuce and spinach also grow quickly, so it isn't *necessary* to start them indoors (although some people still do). Crops that benefit from starting indoors include the heat lovers, such as tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, leeks, onions, and maybe a few marigolds to brighten things up. Cool season crops that need to grow quickly and be harvested before the heat of summer will also do best if started indoors. This includes broccoli, cauliflower, and early cabbages. Brussels sprouts are another crop that does best when started early and transplanted to the garden. Now go through your packets of seeds and make two piles, one for direct seeding in the garden, and another for starting indoors. The packets will usually give information on direct seeding or starting indoors if you aren't sure.

Now that you have your seeds selected for sowing indoors, you need to plan when to start each variety. Find the average last frost date in spring for your area. The updated USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map lists my area as zone 5 with an average last frost date during the 3rd week of May. This doesn't mean that we won't get a frost after that date. It just means that is *average* date of the last frost. I plant my cold hardy plants earlier than that and my heat loving plants later. To figure out when to start my seedlings, I look at the packet to see if it lists how many weeks to plant indoors before the last frost date. Usually you will see instructions to plant 2-3 weeks or 4-6 weeks before the last average frost date. Sit down with the calendar and make a note or a big red X on your average last frost date. Then count back from that date to find out when to plant your seeds. The exceptions to this rule are peppers, which should not be planted until the weather has warmed up more, and cool season crops like broccoli that can be planted a few weeks before the frost danger is over. Adjust your planting times accordingly for these seeds. Make a note on the calendar for each of your crops so you know when everything will need to be planted. Be sure to refer back to your calendar often so you don't forget to plant your little babies on time.

Before you start your seedlings, a spot must be prepared to provide them with the light and warmth they will need to grow. It's possible to put your little plants in a sunny windowsill, but this tends to produce weak, floppy seedlings. The best results will be attained with inexpensive shop lights hung by adjustable wires or chains over a table or shelf. The lights should be kept 1" or 2" above the seedling tops at all times. As the plants grow, you will need to adjust the lights to give them room. I use a metal shelving unit in my basement next to an outlet. The shop lights are hung by wires from the bottom of each shelf and can be adjusted up or down as needed. Each shop light needs to have one warm and one cool white fluorescent tube. This will provide a nearly complete spectrum of light for healthy plant growth. A power strip will allow you to plug in several shop lights if you are starting a large number of plants.

Once your seed starting area is set up you will need to prepare the trays and potting mix. If you are reusing trays or repurposing something like yogurt cups, be sure to clean them thoroughly with warm soapy water and then sterilize them with a 10% bleach solution. Poke holes for

drainage in the bottoms of any containers that don't have any. Potting soil must also be sterile to prevent diseases. You can use soil from your garden to start your seedlings, but you will need to heat it in your oven. Sift the soil through a coarse screen and add a bit of water so it is damp, but not soggy. Spread the soil in roasting pans, cover with foil and put a meat thermometer in the soil. Turn your oven to 250 F and bring the temperature of the soil to 180F for 30 minutes. It will stink up your kitchen, so don't do this right before company comes over! Use one part sterile soil or compost, one part finely milled peat moss, and one part perlite for your potting mix. This will provide a well-drained mix that prevents damping off fungus, the most common malady affecting seedlings. It is easy to recognize because it causes a pinched appearance just above the soil line, killing your little plants. You can also purchase a seed starting mix at the garden center. There is no soil included and this mix will get your baby plants off to a good start. Some of these contain time released fertilizer. Usually these are not organic fertilizers, so you may wish to choose another product. Remember not to add extra fertilizer if the potting mix contains it already.

If your seeds are old, you may want to test their viability, or ability to germinate. Label plastic bags with the names of the seeds you will be testing. Use a dampened paper towel to keep the seeds moist for germination. Count 10 seeds out from a packet, sprinkle them on the paper towel and fold it over. Place in the corresponding plastic bag. Leave in a warm place to germinate and check every day. Some seeds germinate quickly, like lettuce and cabbage. Some seeds, such as peppers, take longer to germinate. If the seeds have not germinated consistently after 2 weeks, you should consider purchasing fresh seeds to replace them. Some seeds, such as parsnips, do not germinate well after just a year or two. Others will keep for long periods with few problems.

Fill your seed flats or trays with moist potting mix to ½" from the top. Sprinkle 2 or 3 seeds in each cell. Check the seed packets for depth to sow. Some seeds need light to germinate and others should have potting mix over the top. Water lightly, cover with a clean plastic lid or plastic wrap draped lightly over the trays. A seed starting mat will keep the soil warm and speed germination. You can place the trays in a warm spot if you don't have seed starting mats. Check every day for germination. As soon as you see little sprouts, remove the plastic covering and place trays under your shop light. The lights should be on a timer to come on for 12 to 14 hours each day. If each seed planted germinates, you will need to pinch back all but the strongest seedling in each cell or pot.

As your seedlings grow it is a good idea to brush your hand lightly over their tops, or have a fan blowing lightly over them for a period of time every day. This makes their stems stronger in preparation for outdoor life. Be sure to water them regularly, but don't keep the soil too wet or they may suffer from root rot. A week or two before transplanting your little ones to the garden, you will need to begin hardening them off. On warm days the trays of seedlings will be moved outdoors to a spot protected from wind and sun. Start gradually, moving them out for short periods and increasing a little each day. They will need to be brought back inside for the night or put in a cold frame or greenhouse to protect them from the chill. After a few days of this treatment, they can handle a bit more sun and wind. Gradually increase their exposure to

the elements until a few days before planting in the garden. At this point you may leave them outside overnight unless the temps drop too low. It's important to pay attention to the weather during this transition. You don't want to leave the tender young plants outside in a wind or rain storm, or leave them overnight when frost threatens.

When your little seedlings are ready for transplanting to the garden, be sure to pick a day that is overcast. This prevents burning their leaves in the full sun. Plant them as deep as they were in the pot. Tomatoes do best if planted deeper, with just the top set of leaves sticking up. Remove the rest of their leaves and roots will grow all along their stems. Water transplants well. It is a good idea to cover your seedlings with a floating row cover or pots for shade and protection from cool nights until they are accustomed to outdoor life. Be sure they don't overheat on sunny days, cover on cold nights, and check often for signs of stress. A light application of fish emulsion or kelp powder will help them get off to a good start.

With a little bit of planning and effort you could have your new seedlings off to a good start in a nice, loamy bed just a few feet away from beds of cold hardy seedlings and perennial vegetables and fruits! Cold hardy crops such as beets, carrots, parsnips, salsify, lettuce, spinach, and arugula can be sown as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring. They will give you a head start on fresh veggies when other gardeners are just starting to plant their beds in the spring. If you've made the investment in perennial plantings, you could have other beds dedicated to asparagus, strawberries, horseradish, walking onions, and rhubarb. One of my favorite perennial crops in the garden is rhubarb.

Growing Rhubarb

Rhubarb is a very easy care perennial crop that will reward your investment every year. You can order the crowns from most any seed catalog or garden center in the spring, or you might get few crowns off a neighbor or gardening buddy. They multiply quickly and should be divided every few years, so anyone who has rhubarb in their yard will likely have extra to share. Choose a spot where you will not be tilling the soil, since rhubarb is a perennial. Rhubarb grows best in a slightly acid soil in temperate zones where the ground freezes in the winter. Dig the soil deeply and add compost or well-rotted manure. Mix in thoroughly and dig a hole deep enough to accommodate the crown. Spread the roots out and cover with soil. Don't cover the rounded little nubs that will unfurl into leaves. Water in well and watch them grow.

Rhubarb needs to grow for at least a year or two before you start harvesting the stalks. If you started with a big clump from another gardener you should be able to harvest the year after planting. Crowns ordered from a seed catalog or purchased at the garden center will probably need two years before you begin picking. If your rhubarb plant produces a flower stalk, remove it. It will drain energy that is needed for growing more stalks. To harvest, cut stalks close to the ground and remove all leaves. Rhubarb leaves contain poisonous concentrations of oxalic acid, so care must be taken with children and pets in the garden.

If you have a nicely established bed of rhubarb, you may try your hand at forcing growth in the spring for an early harvest. Be sure the soil is moist around the dormant plants and cover a few crowns with buckets of straw. Check every week or so for growth. As the young stems grow, you can harvest them for a tender treat.

Freshly harvested rhubarb can be rinsed, chopped, and used in pies, muffins, cakes, jams, rhubarb sauce, and in rhubarb bread. You may also freeze it in 1” pieces to use for winter treats. There is no need to blanch it first, just pop it into a freezer bag or vacuum seal and freeze. My favorite recipe for rhubarb is this quick bread that is so moist it tastes more like cake.

Recipe: Rhubarb Bread

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups unbleached flour
- 1 cup whole wheat or multi-grain flour
- 1/2 cup cornmeal
- 1 1/2 cups + 3 Tbs sugar
- 2 cups milk
- 1/2 cup canola oil
- 1 tsp molasses
- 2 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups chopped rhubarb

Instructions

In a small bowl, mix together chopped rhubarb and 3 Tbs sugar. Set aside. Thoroughly combine dry ingredients in medium mixing bowl. Add milk, oil, molasses and eggs and stir together until lumps are gone. Add rhubarb mixture and fold into batter. Pour into 2 greased 8x4x2" loaf pans and bake at 350F for 60 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.

Lisa Lynn

Lisa has been a gardener and a homesteader of sorts her whole life. Even living in a subdivision for many years didn't slow her down much. Her vegetable garden took over the whole yard, fruit trees lined their property, and she raised meat rabbits and butchered them herself. Their kitchen was turned into a sauna every summer as she canned jams, fruits, and vegetables, but it never seemed like enough. So her family moved to a one acre agricultural property in 2010 and she dove in head first. Now they have their own chickens for meat and eggs, fruit trees, and a large vegetable garden. Every year she's added to her homesteading skills and she loves to share her experience on her blog: The Self Sufficient HomeAcre. Encouraging others to try these old world skills gives her a great sense of purpose.

June :: Ground Cherries

Ground cherries (also known as husk tomato) grow inside paper weight husks and are a perfect summer treat. They are similar to tomatoes, yet have a slightly citrus taste that is unlike anything else in our garden. While we love to collect them as they fall and pop them right into our mouths, a few large plants will easily produce more than you can eat. The novelty of peeling off the husks after the harvest is perfect for little fingers, so if you have children around, you are almost sure to have some helpers.

Growing Ground Cherries

Ground cherries are a warm season crop and can only be planted outside after all danger of frost has passed. If you are starting your plants from seeds, start them indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost. We have found that the seeds take longer to germinate than tomatoes and are slow to grow over the first few weeks. If after a month your little plants are just an inch high, don't despair, these little plants will soon explode with growth. In the photo below, all

the seeds were planted at the same time. The seedlings in the front are ground cherries, and the larger seedlings are tomatoes.

Once your outside soil is thoroughly warm, harden off your plants and transplant them outside by burying the seedlings into the garden with just the top leaves exposed. The roots will grow out from the stem and the plants are less likely to tip over when the stem has been buried. Ground cherries need full sun and a well-drained soil to thrive, so are ideal candidates for a raised bed. A full grown ground cherry plant can be several feet around, so space your plants no closer than 2 feet. Crowding your plants will make it very difficult to harvest the fruits from where they fall on the ground.

You can expect to harvest your first ground cherries about 70 days after you transplant them and continue to harvest them until the first frost. They are ready to collect when the husk turns brown and the fruit turns golden. We usually let the fruit simply fall to the ground and collect the fruit every few days. If the ground cherries are not ripe when they fall, simply leave them out for several days, do not eat the fruits when they are green. You can store ground cherries for several months in their husks if kept in a cool place.

Recipe: Ground Cherry Salsa

Ingredients: You can easily adjust the amount of each ingredient by your preference and what's currently available in your area. Our salsa tends to change over the course of the summer as things come in and out of season, but this is our favorite.

- several tomatoes
- a few cloves of garlic
- ground cherries
- onion (1)
- cilantro
- a squeeze of lime juice
- a drizzle of honey
- a bit of salt
- a pepper (optional)

Instructions

Dice the tomatoes, garlic, ground cherries, onion, pepper, and cilantro. Put in a strainer to let out some of the tomato juice (skip this step if you like really juicy salsa). Mix in the honey, salt and lime juice and serve. If you aren't serving right away, leave out the honey, salt, and lime juice until right before serving. You can store the salsa for a few days, but it is best fresh.

Gretchen Stuppy Carlson

Gretchen lives in upstate NY with her three young children and husband on an emerging 2 1/2 acre backyard farm. Like so many people, they are making the move to live closer to the earth, to think about where their food and belongings come from, to regain homesteading skills, and to strengthen the family connection through farming. You can follow along with her at The Backyard Farming Connection or Simple and Joyful Living.

July :: Farmers Markets and Canning

Six years ago we bought a house in the country and began some extensive renovations to turn it into our dream home. I asked my husband if we were going to have a vegetable garden, and he asked me, "Why would you want to go to all the trouble of having a garden when there are farm markets just a few miles down the road?" He had a good point and, after all, we were over-extended with our house project—so no garden.

We are very blessed to live in a rural area where farm grown fruits and vegetables are so readily available. In the late summer and early fall months we visit the farm markets every couple of days for fresh picked corn on the cob, cucumbers, zucchinis, tomatoes, peppers, squash, eggplant, garlic, onions, water melon, cantaloupes, peaches, apples, and pumpkins.

Oh how I miss them when they are out of season. I soon came to realize, however, that we could have these amazing, nutritional foods year-round by canning and freezing them.

Preserving foods was something I had never done before, but I was anxious to give it a try. I felt nervous at first, but after a couple of successful efforts, I was confident and excited to do as much canning and freezing as I could. I learned the basic principles and then put them into action again and again.

My husband was interested and enjoyed learning too. On canning day, we were the first to arrive at the Ambrose Farm Market when it opened at 9:00 a.m. Moments later, the parking lot was full, and people filled the market, selecting their fresh produce grown on location. All those colorful, ripe vegetables were waiting for eager hands to guide them into some succulent recipes.

I decided I wanted to start with tomato sauce and canned tomatoes. Having no experience at canning, I had some trouble making my selection. But the third-generation owner of the 50-acre farm was so kind and helpful. She steered me to mix Roma (for their meaty flesh) with Beef Steak tomatoes (for their sweet flavor). We bought a bushel and a half! As we were leaving, my husband helped another customer load her car with her purchases. She had two shopping carts full of vegetables and a bright smile on her face. She said, "Ahh, August! It's the month for canning!" Here was an experienced canner as thrilled in anticipating her project as I was for the first time. How encouraging!

We got our tomatoes home and washed and were ready to begin canning. When we renovated our kitchen, we kept our old appliances and moved them to the basement. It's so convenient to have the extra refrigerator/freezer for storing foods and the extra oven for large family gatherings. It's very nice to have a "summer kitchen" for canning. We cleaned the area and got all set up for our new experience.

We really dove into this canning thing. A friend gave us a hot water canner, and we went out and bought some jars, a canning accessory kit, and our big splurge was buying a vegetable strainer. It is really slick. It quickly and easily separates the juices from the skin and seeds. Several times I thought about how much more time it would take to do this by hand.

We ended up with a 21-qt. stock pot full almost to the brim with sweet smelling, robust tomato juices. We boiled the juices until the volume was reduced by half. I did not realize how long this would take. Four hours later, the sauce was ready, and so were the jars that I had sterilized in the hot water bath. I added 1 T. of lemon juice to each quart of tomato sauce. I chose not to add salt. We got 10 qts. of sauce and then 7 qts. of diced tomatoes out of that bushel and a half. I was giddy as I was cleaning up and heard the ping, ping, ping, of the jars sealing. I felt like we had succeeded in our first attempt at canning!

Naturally, we were anxious to taste some right away, so the next day I used some of the tomato sauce to make spaghetti sauce with meat balls. I clipped some of the fresh basil and oregano that I have growing in pots near my kitchen door and added garlic, onion, and red pepper flakes. (No preservatives, and no added sugars or salt.) My, oh my, if I do say so myself, this was the best spaghetti sauce I ever had. What a difference super-fresh, just-picked ingredients make in food preparation. I became hooked on canning!

That first summer we froze corn off the cob and sliced red peppers. We canned tomatoes, tomato sauce, salsa, and red pepper relish. We had so much fun and received so much satisfaction from canning vegetables that we didn't want to stop. So we moved on to canning fruits.

Pennsylvania has lots of peach orchards, ranking among the nation's top-10 peach producers. The first harvest begins in mid-July and winds down about the middle of September. The most popular and desired peaches around here are the Chambersburg Peaches, but they are not actually a variety of peaches. Chambersburg is a town in central Pennsylvania, once the top growers and sellers of peaches in the state. Peaches of the same variety grown in other locales, usually the Red Haven variety, are often referred to as Chambersburg peaches because of their high quality. They certainly are the biggest, sweetest, juiciest peaches you will find, good for eating, canning and baking. If you like peaches, you just can't get enough of them.

We bought a bushel of Chambersburg peaches from our local fruit market. Pajer Farm Market and Bakery is a family owned and operated business that has been in the area for decades. It's a lovely place to visit. You can't help but come away with fresh baked goods made on the premises, fresh fruits in season, and even colorful flowers from their fields.

We used most of the bushel we bought for canning and freezing, yielding 14 quarts of canned and 8 quarts of frozen peach slices. During the snowy days of winter, we will smack our lips when we open those jars of Chambersburg peaches for lunches or smell the tantalizing aroma of peach crisps and peach pies baking in the oven.

Of course, we had to hold back some of those peaches for eating right away and just couldn't wait to make that first fresh peach pie of the season.

My family really enjoys the foods that we preserve and use for cooking and baking. I still want to have a garden. I would like to take that next step of canning foods that we grew ourselves. Maybe someday. For now, I really am spoiled with these great farm markets that reduce my work but provide jobs for many local people during the planting and harvesting seasons.

Recipe: Canned Tomato Sauce

Makes about 7 quarts

- 1 bushel Roma tomatoes
- ½ bushel Big Bog tomatoes
- Lemon juice

Prepare canner, jars and lids. Fill hot water canner half full with water and bring to a boil. Boil jars for 10 minutes to sterilize them. Put water in a small saucepan and heat but do not boil. Heat lids and rings for 10 minutes.

Wash and quarter tomatoes.

Puree tomatoes in a food mill.

Cook the juice in a large, uncovered saucepot over medium-high heat until sauce thickens, stirring to prevent sticking. Reduce volume by half.

Add 2 T. lemon juice to each hot quart jar.

Add 1 t. salt to each jar (optional).

Ladle hot sauce into hot jars, leaving 1/2 inch headspace.

Slide a small plastic spatula along the inside of the jar to remove air bubbles.

Wipe rim of jar with a damp cloth.

Place lid on jar and then screw on ring until you feel a resistance.

Process quarts for 40 minutes in the boiling water canner.

Remove jars from canner and set on a towel two inches apart until they are cool.

When the lids seal you may hear a pinging noise.

After the jars are cool, wipe them with a damp cloth and store them on a shelf.

Recipe: Fresh Peach Pie

Pastry for 9-inch two-crust pie

- 5 cups sliced fresh peaches (about 9 medium)
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 cups sugar
- ¼ cup flour
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine

Prepare pastry. Heat oven to 425° F. Mix peaches and lemon juice. Stir together flour and cinnamon; mix with the peaches. Pour into pastry-lined pie pan; dot with pats of butter. Cover with top crust; seal and flute the edges. Make slits in the top crust. Cover edge with strips of aluminum foil to prevent burning; remove foil last 15 minutes of baking.

Bake pie for 35 to 45 minutes or until crust is brown and the juice begins to bubble through slits in the crust.

Recipe: Mom's Perfect Flaky Pie Crust

When I got married, my first few attempts at making pies didn't turn out very good. So I asked my Mom to teach me. Mom gave me her tips as she demonstrated her art. I learned quickly, and from then on people raved about my pies, especially the flaky crusts.

Nowadays, it is so easy to use the refrigerator pie crusts that you can buy in a grocery store. I guess they're OK in a pinch if you're in a major hurry. But, truth be told, they are just not the same as old-fashioned, homemade pie crusts. Unless time is of the utmost essence, there is really no need to forgo this timeless treasure--not when you have the right recipe and know-how. So I gladly share with you lessons I learned at my Mom's side.

This recipe makes 5 pie crusts. I know it's a weird number. I usually use it to make two two-crust pies and one single-crust pie, or I just use the extra crust to make a couple of dumplings. The unbaked dough can be frozen for up to six weeks. Remove from the freezer an hour before using.

- 4 C. flour, unsifted
- 2 T. sugar
- 1 t. salt
- 1 3/4 C. shortening
- 1 large egg
- 1/2 C. cold water
- 1 T. white or cider vinegar

In a large bowl, mix the first three ingredients well with a fork.

Add shortening and mix well with a fork or pastry blender until crumbly.

In a small bowl, beat the egg with the water and vinegar.

Combine the two mixtures, stirring until well moistened.

Divide into five parts. Shape each into a round flat. Wrap in wax paper and chill at least 1/2 hour.

Tips for Perfect Flaky Pie Crust

Here is the big secret to flaky pie crust: DON'T TOUCH the dough with your hands at all and KEEP IT COOL. If it is a warm day, you may want to place your mixing bowl in the refrigerator for several minutes. Also, don't over-mix the ingredients. The dough should be crumbly, not kneaded smooth.

Wait until you see the flakiness of this pie crust! And just wait until your family and friends see and taste your perfect old-fashioned pies! Happy old-fashioned eating!

Katie Driscoll

Katie grew up in a Christ-centered home with tender, loving, grace-filled parents. She loves life's simple pleasures, like ducks and chickens, gardening and gathering. She's not a professional author or photographer, but she is a picture-taker/story-teller. That's why she started blogging. She and her husband enjoy the creative challenge of turning trash into treasure and designing and making furniture in a primitive or distressed style. They are DIYers who enjoy sharing their ideas and being inspired by the ideas of others. Maple Grove is their homestead in Southwestern Pennsylvania. God has so incredibly blessed her with a loving husband, children, and grandchildren. She prays she is able to use the gifts He gave her to give Him glory and be a blessing to others.

August :: Heirloom Tomatoes

Growing Tomatoes

I began my love affair with heirloom tomatoes in 2007. I was drawn in by a beautiful slicing tomato named after Julia Child. I loved the thought of growing a tomato in my garden that bore the name of my culinary idol. I learned to cook by watching her shows on PBS every day after school. While most children were watching cartoons, I was taking notes and watching Julia hold court in her kitchen. It seemed natural that I would want to grow a tomato that she had handpicked to be her namesake.

I intended to simply order a packet of seeds and attempt to grow the beautiful pink tomatoes that were pictured in the catalog. As I browsed the selection of heirloom tomatoes, I reasoned that I might as well try a few other varieties to increase my odds of success. I added packets of Purple Calabash, Black Cherry, and Green Zebra varieties to my cart and placed my order.

When the right time came, I cautiously planted the seeds and began my family's heirloom tomato experiment. Eventually, the glorious day arrived when the first heirloom tomato was perfectly ripe. I gingerly removed the uniquely shaped fruit from the plant and transported it into our farmhouse. Moments later, I was cutting the tomato into thick slices and preparing for my family to take our first bites.

The tomato was still warm from the sun as I sliced it. It was juicy and toothsome. It had the perfect combination of sweetness and tangy acidity. It was the best tasting tomato I had ever tasted. At that moment, I became a true believer in not only heirloom tomatoes, but in the power of growing fresh food right outside our farmhouse door.

Since then, we have been inspired to add countless heirloom varieties to our ever expanding gardens. We now grow heirloom greens, berries, radishes, beans, and onions. Each summer, we find ourselves adding to our lineup of heirloom tomatoes and planting more seedlings than the year before.

Last summer, we planted well over 150 heirloom tomato seedlings and offered dozens for sale to local customers at our farm. Our love of heirloom tomatoes has motivated us to expand our gardens each summer. A few years after our first gardening success, we took a giant leap and added chickens to our farm. A year after we became chicken keepers, three dairy goats came to call our circa 1840 barn home.

It all started with the tomatoes. It's fair to say that the first bite of that Julia Child tomato forever changed my life. I understand that you might question my use of such a substantial statement when extolling my debt of gratitude to a piece of fruit. Yet it happens to be absolutely true.

That first bite of perfect tomato made me realize that I wanted to grow more of the food that graced our family table. It inspired me to hold our food supply closer at hand and teach our

children to do the same. Since then, I have been working tirelessly to meet that goal alongside three generations of my family and sharing the experience with my readers at www.1840Farm.com.

This year, I'll return to the garden dreaming of the impending heirloom tomato season. I will put into practice the knowledge gained from several years of tomato growing experience. My whole family will count the days until that first ripe heirloom tomato is ready to enjoy.

Julia Child famously proclaimed, "Find something you're passionate about and keep tremendously interested in it." I have done just that. I hope that you will do the same. If you find yourself in search of inspiration, I can guarantee that you won't need to look any further than your garden.

At 1840 Farm, we love to eat tomatoes as much as I love to grow them. To me, a vine ripened heirloom tomato still warm from the sun's rays is as close to perfection as food can get. In fact, I prefer to eat a tomato as close to that state as possible. All summer, we enjoy raw tomatoes on sandwiches, tossed with warm pasta and fresh basil from the garden, and on served simply on slices of crusty bread.

We never tire of eating tomatoes for lunch and dinner during heirloom tomato season. Unfortunately, tomato season is painfully short here in New England. For most of the year, we can only watch the calendar and wait for our growing season to return.

We have learned to extend the portion of the year when we can enjoy eating our heirloom tomatoes. We preserve some of them by canning both as sauce and savory jam. We freeze batches of heirloom tomato soup destined to be warmed up on a cold winter day and easily finished off by adding a touch of cream and a little seasoning.

We also discovered another way to extend our tomato eating season that produces fantastic results. When cherry tomatoes are being picked by the bucket during the height of our season, we are content in the knowledge that the coming winter will be filled with hearty tomato dishes made with those very fruits.

I realize that what I am about to suggest will come across as ironic advice coming from someone who professes her love of a fresh tomato. I'm going to suggest it anyway because it is a tried and true method of preserving tomato season here at 1840 Farm. Trust me when I tell you that cherry tomatoes can be frozen whole, stored in the freezer, and used during the winter months to make delicious, fresh tasting tomato recipes.

The process is simple. Wash and thoroughly dry cherry tomatoes before placing them on a sheet pan lined with freezer paper. Place the pan in the freezer and allow them to freeze overnight. Transfer the completely frozen cherry tomatoes to a freezer bag, remove the excess air, and close the bag tightly.

This method of preservation is simple and provides my family with a supply of garden grown heirloom tomatoes that can be transformed into all types of dishes for our family table. On cold winter days, I simmer these frozen tomatoes into rich pasta sauces or add them into chili or other recipes calling for diced tomatoes. Their flavor is superb and imparts their fresh flavor to the resulting dish in a way that canned tomatoes cannot. Every bite reminds us that we're one day closer to the return of heirloom tomato season.

This dish can be made using fresh tomatoes from your garden or cherry tomatoes stored in your freezer. Either way, it will be delicious and hearty. It has the tangy acidity of a homegrown tomato and richness of a sauce that is allowed to cook long enough for the natural sugars to caramelize and bring depth to the final dish.

Just this winter, we began grinding our own grains including the cornmeal we use to make this polenta. The fresh ground cornmeal is surprisingly flavorful. Before grinding our own cornmeal, we had no idea just how much flavor a freshly ground cornmeal had. Now we know better. Cornmeal and tomatoes share that trait in common. They just taste better when you produce them yourself. One bite of either and you'll be a true believer, too.

Recipe: Heirloom Tomato Marinara with Oven baked Polenta

Serves 6 as a main course

Ingredients

- 8 cups water
- 1 Tablespoon salt
- 2 cups cornmeal
- olive oil
- 1 Tablespoon butter
- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 ounce dry vermouth
- 2 ounces tomato paste
- 1 pound cherry tomatoes
- ½ cup vegetable stock or water
- salt and pepper
- shredded parmesan cheese

Instructions

Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Prepare a shallow casserole dish or baking pan by brushing with olive oil. Set aside.

In a large pot, bring 8 cups of water to a boil. Add 1 Tablespoon salt and return to boil. Place cornmeal in a large mixing bowl. Ladle some of the boiling water into the cornmeal and whisk to incorporate. Add enough water to make a thin batter. Slowly add the thin batter to the pot of boiling water, whisking constantly.

Return the cornmeal mixture to a boil while whisking constantly to prevent lumps from forming. Once the mixture comes to a boil, reduce the heat to low. Continue to simmer, whisking often for approximately 30 minutes. The fully cooked polenta will become thick as it cooks, but should retain its smooth and silky texture. If the mixture becomes too thick, simply add a bit of warm water and whisk to combine.

As the polenta cooks, prepare the tomato sauce. Place a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add butter and olive oil. Once the butter is melted, add the onion and stir to coat. Cook until the onion is translucent, approximately 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for one minute. Add the vermouth, scraping the bottom of the pan to release any caramelized pieces of onion or garlic. Add the tomato paste and stir to fully combine.

Add the cherry tomatoes to the pan and stir to combine. Allow the tomatoes to cook for 2-3 minutes or until they begin to soften and release their juices. Using the back of a spoon or a potato masher, lightly crush the tomatoes.

Reduce the heat the low. Allow the sauce to simmer for 10 minutes or until thick. Taste for seasoning, adding salt and pepper as needed. Add more broth if necessary to prevent the sauce from drying out as the polenta bakes.

Once the polenta has fully cooked, transfer the mixture to the oiled pan. Spread the polenta to the edges of the pan, smoothing the top of the mixture. Lightly brush the top of the polenta with a light coating of olive oil. Season the polenta with salt and pepper. Transfer the pan to the preheated oven.

Bake the polenta for 10 minutes to allow the mixture to set. Turn on the broiler and broil for approximately 5 minutes or until the top is lightly browned and crispy.

Remove the polenta from the oven. Transfer squares of polenta to plates before topping with the tomato mixture. Garnish with shredded parmesan cheese and serve.

Jennifer Burcke

Jennifer began her love affair with heirloom tomatoes in 2007. She was drawn in by a beautiful slicing tomato named after Julia Child. She loved the thought of growing a tomato in her garden that bore the name of her culinary idol. Jennifer learned to cook by watching her shows on PBS every day after school. While most children were watching cartoons, she was taking notes and watching Julia hold court in her kitchen. It seemed natural that she would want to grow a tomato that she had handpicked to be her namesake. You can read more from Jennifer at 1840 Farm.

September :: Beets

Growing Beets

Beets! Are you running in the other direction yet? Most people will admit to not liking beets. Once I chat with them a bit though, what I find out is they really don't like or dislike them, instead they lack exposure to them. When people find out we grow them, they are even more intrigued, wondering why we would grow them, then how do we eat them. It is pretty simple why we grow them...we love them! We enjoy beets a number of ways in our home – raw,

roasted and pickled. And let's not forget one of the great things about beets; you can eat the leaves, making the entire plant edible. We eat the leaves raw in salads and lightly sautéed with garlic.

So have I peeked your interest in beets? I hope so. I will share with you how easy it is to grow them and then get your mouth watering with a lovely quinoa, carrot and beet salad, perfect for a late summer dinner on the back deck.

Crop Overview

Related to both spinach and Swiss chard in the amaranth family, beets are both a root crop and a leafy green, making it a great vegetable to grow in a backyard garden. Beets are best started from seeds sown directly in the garden, as they can transplant poorly. When you open the seed packet don't be surprised to see clusters inside, and not individual seeds. Each cluster is two to five seeds encased in a rough round husk. From each of these husks emerges a tight little cluster of seedlings, once planted. The outer shell is very tough; soaking it overnight before planting can help to speed up germination.

Beets thrive in rich, well-worked soil, fed with compost, deeply dug or tilled, and raked to a fine texture free of large rocks or clods of clay. Sensitive to pH, beets need fairly alkaline soil, in the range of 6.8 to 7.8 on the pH scale. If you have acidic soil, an application of garden lime, along with a natural granular fertilizer rich in minerals will be helpful.

Beets can be planted in the spring once the soil has warmed up and dried out. A soil temperature of 50 degrees F is ideal. For a longer harvest, consider planting in succession, every two to three weeks. Beets can also be planted later in the summer for a fall harvest. Wait until evening temperatures begin to drop and begin planting again. Your last planting should be about 90 days before your expected first frost. When planting, sow soaked clusters about 2 inches apart, and about ½ inch deep, then cover, water and watch.

Once your beets are on their way, thin them to 3 to 4 inches apart and mulch with straw. All those lovely thinnings can be eaten and enjoyed.

After thinning, beets are one of those garden vegetables that really do their own thing. They will need steady moisture, a good watering twice a week if Mother Nature has not provided any rain and maybe a little bit of fertilizer if your soil is lacking nutrients.

Beet greens can be harvested when they are a couple of inches tall, and the beets can be harvested once they are about 2 inches in diameter. Beets tend to become tougher and less sweet the larger they get, so harvest when they are smaller for a sweeter tasting beet. To harvest, gently tug on the stems or dig carefully around the beet to loosen it. Leave at least a 1 inch stem on the beets to prevent bleeding if you plan to cook them.

It really couldn't be any easier. Beets are easy to plant, care for and harvest, they provide both leafy greens and a lovely root vegetable and they can be eaten raw or cooked and preserved for enjoyment all winter long.

Recipe: Quinoa, Carrot and Beet Salad

Salad

- 1 cup quinoa, rinsed and cooked in 2 cups of water
- 3 carrots, grated
- 2 beets, grated
- 1 avocado, peeled and chopped
- ¼ cup pumpkin seeds

Dressing

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 3 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 2 tbsp mustard
- 2 tbsp maple syrup
- 1 tbsp nutritional yeast (optional)
- Pinch or two of salt or pepper

Layer salad ingredients in a large bowl in the order listed**.** Just before serving add the dressing and mix well.

Enjoy!

Kim Corrigan-Oliver

Kim Corrigan-Oliver is a mom, holistic nutritionist, birth doula and writer. She lives in Ontario, Canada on a little piece of land where she and her family grow their own food, raise chickens and get ready to welcome some bees. They strive to live simply, in tune with the seasons, close to the earth and each other. She shares her mothering journey at Mothering with Mindfulness, giving readers a glimpse into life with her little man, as they explore the world around them and all it has to offer.

October :: Pumpkins

October is the month of the pumpkin, for the pumpkin is the true icon of the harvest. When one sees a pumpkin, they immediately think autumn and the two major holidays: Halloween and Thanksgiving. No other vegetable is so associated with a season or celebrations. Along with its obvious association with Halloween, October is the month of the pumpkin harvest in most of the United States. The word "Pumpkin" came from the Greek language word *Pepon* and through the years and the use by the French, English, and Americans it mutated into the word Pumpkin. Pumpkins originated in America, although those early pumpkins did not look anything like the pumpkins of today. Instead of the plump round Jack O Lantern we are used to, they were a crooked neck type resembling a squash but they did store well which made them popular with early Americans.

Growing Pumpkins

Pumpkins, maize and beans were often grown together by early American farmers. They had learned to grow squash with maize and beans using the "Three Sisters" tradition of planting in Native American culture. The three plants have a symbiotic relationship. The corn grows tall and loves nitrogen. It provided a trellis for the beans to grow on and the beans, with true legume behavior, gave the corn the nitrogen it needed. The pumpkins grew long trailing vines with broad leaves that kept out weeds, and shaded the soil, preserving moisture. The 3 plants thrived together and the "3 Sister" planting method is still used by many organic gardeners.

Pumpkins are members of the Cucurbit family which includes pumpkins, squash, watermelon, and cucumbers so they like the same things as the other members of their family - full sun, water, good drainage, and nitrogen/fertilizer. Because of their size, most pumpkins require a long growing season - the bigger the pumpkin the longer it takes to get to that size.

There are some tricks to growing pumpkins, particularly when you live in the far north as I do. Most pumpkin varieties require 110 to 140 growing days (without frost) to grow to full size. This is all dependent a number of factors - the variety you are going to grow, your particular climate, and the hours of sunlight in your summer day. Here in the north, I have to start my pumpkins inside. I soak the seeds in water overnight, before planting in potting soil, to speed up the germination process. I put them in a window that gets a lot of sunlight, and supplement the natural light with a grow light as pumpkin transplants can get very spindly without good light.

Picking the right place to finally plant your pumpkin transplants is also important. They love the sun, so pick a spot that gets a minimum of 6 hours full sunlight (more will be better). They are also going to need plenty of room as they produce long trailing vines (up to 30 feet) with big leaves that can crowd out smaller plants. With care you can trim and train your pumpkin vines to act as natural "mulch". And pumpkins love water but they also like "dry feet" so pick a spot with good drainage. Many growers will plant pumpkins in little mounded hills but if your soil has good drainage you don't have to worry about that. Be sure to fertilize the ground before

you plant. Pumpkins love a rich soil. I use my compost pile, in which last year's hen house cleanouts were incorporated, to mix into the pumpkin patch before I set out my plants.

Taking care of your pumpkins during the growing season is fairly easy. In the beginning before the vines get big, you will need to weed them but once they gain some size there large leaves and profuse vines will choke out weeds. They love to "eat", so through the season, I use fish emulsion to feed them (remember the Native Americans placed fish in the bottom of their planting holes). And they love water. Pumpkins are 80 - 90% water so they will love a drink. Be sure to water them in the morning so that the leaves are dry by evening. Pumpkins are susceptible to molds and fungi and a lot of the problems can be prevented by not watering after noon.

Pumpkins have both male and female flowers so they need pollination to produce "baby pumpkins". If you have lots of bees frequenting your garden, they will take care of the job but if not, you can be the pollinator. Both the male and female flowers are a golden color and look very similar. Male pumpkin flowers will appear first on long thin stems. Usually there are more males than females. The female flowers will be closer to the vine and have fuzzy, round bottoms. To pollinate, take an artist's brush and gather pollen from the male flower on it. Then dust the inner part of the female flower with the pollen laden brush and voila - you have a pregnant pumpkin blossom.

As with any plants, pumpkins have their pests. A lot of common garden pests, like slugs, avoid pumpkins because of their fuzzy textured leaves and vines. Gophers and moles can be attracted to pumpkins. Bugs that like squash plants like aphids, beetles, and vine borers will be attracted to them. I try to use the least harmful methods of protection on things that I eat. Good care

such as enriched soil, weeding, and careful watering will help the pumpkin ward off a lot of pests.

In late August, you will notice that the green pumpkins will start to change color and the vines will begin to look old and worn out. The energy of the plant turns to the "fruit" helping the pumpkin ripen. You can start harvesting when the pumpkin turns a color somewhere between golden yellow and fiery red, dependent on the variety you have grown. When you cut the pumpkin from the vine, leave several inches of stem. Let them cure in the sun for 10 days. Be sure to cover them if you have a frost. Store your pumpkins in a cool, dry place and they last for a long time. I have had some last to March after being harvested in late September.

Cooking Pumpkins

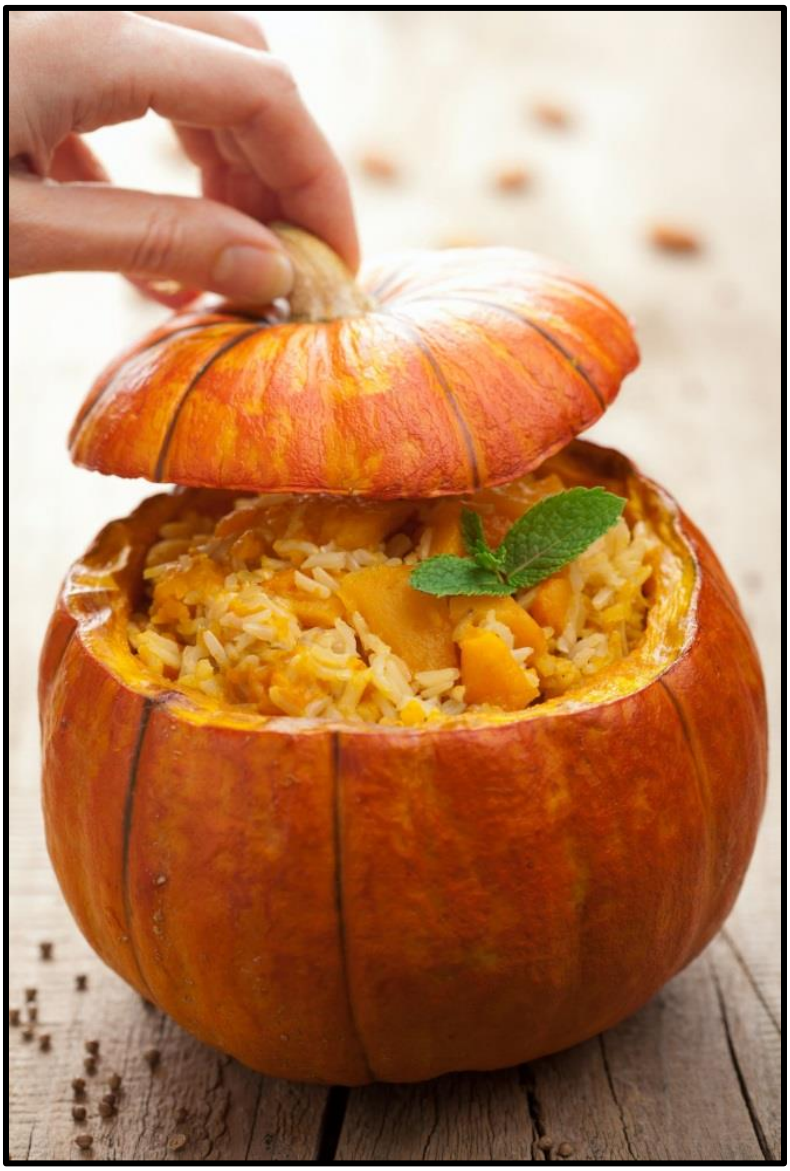
Native Americans roasted pumpkins for eating by cutting them into long strips and threaded the strips on sticks which were stuck in the ground near the fire. They saved the seeds and used them as food, medicine, and for replanting. They dried the pumpkin flesh and ground it into flour to make it more storable. And they used the dried pumpkin shells as bowls and containers. The Native Americans introduced the Pilgrims to the Pumpkin and it was recorded as being eaten at the second Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims took advantage of the storability of the Pumpkin to give them food through the winter.

The earliest "Pumpkin Pie" served by the Pilgrims is nothing like what we think of today. The Pilgrims method of preparation started with cutting off the top of the Pumpkin, scooping out the seeds and leaving the flesh. Then they would fill the hollowed out pumpkin with cream, honey, beaten eggs, and spices and place the top back on the pumpkin. The filled pumpkin was carefully buried in a hole filled with the ash bed of their cooking fire. There it roasted until cooked through. The pumpkin would be totally blackened when it was taken out of the pit but the inside was a sort of pumpkin custard.

Pumpkins are a very versatile vegetable. They can be made into side dishes, relishes, desserts, and even serving containers. All parts of the pumpkin are usable. The lid and shell can be scooped out and made into a tureen for soup, or a stylish dish for a casserole. After the membrane is removed, the seeds can be roasted for healthy and delicious snacks. And the flesh can be cooked and pureed for pies and soups, or roasted for a number of tasty side dishes.

Along with the traditional pumpkin pie, I have used pumpkin to make chutney, breads, and risotto. Any recipe that calls for a winter squash will also work for pumpkin. Today I am sharing my Slow Cooker Pumpkin Risotto with you.

Recipe: The Wilderness Wife's Slow Cooker Pumpkin Risotto



Risotto, that yummy gourmet comfort food, has intimidated a lot of cooks, including me. After seeing an enraged, cursing Chef Gordon Ramsey throw a sauté pan full of risotto into the garbage while Hell's Kitchen competitors look on with wide eyed shock, you definitely get the impression that you should be terrified to attempt risotto. Risotto also gets a bad rap because it is very time consuming, needing to be stirred and added to constantly for at least 20 - 25 minutes. What busy Mom has that kind of uninterrupted time on her hands? But if you really

think about risotto, and why it needs time and attention, it really lends itself to crock pot cooking. Yes, I know that there are going to be “Risotto purists” who will think that my method is a sacrilege and my reply to them is, “get over it”. Anyone who has had my version of risotto hasn’t complained. I rest my case.

I love cooking with pumpkins and so I have developed my own Pumpkin Risotto, which can add a whole new flavor to Thanksgiving dinner or make any evenings dinner an event.

Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 4 hours
Total Time: 4 hours, 15 minutes
Yield: Serves 6

Ingredients

- 3 Tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Divided
- 1/2 Medium Onion, Finely diced
- 1 Clove Garlic, Finely diced
- 1 2/3 Cup Arborio Rice
- 1 1/2 c. pumpkin puree or 1 (15 Oz.) Can Pumpkin Puree (Not Pumpkin Pie Filling!)
- ½ tsp. dry sage
- 1 tsp. Dried Rosemary
- 1 (32 Oz.) Carton Chicken Broth
- 1/2 Cup Freshly Grated Parmesan Cheese
- 2 cups Roast Pumpkin cut into 1 inch cubes

Instructions

In a sauté pan, sauté the diced onion in 2 tablespoons of the olive oil until almost translucent. Add garlic and sauté for 1 minute longer.

Use the remaining tablespoon of olive oil to oil the inside of a crock-pot.

In the crock pot, gently combine the sautéed vegetables with the Arborio Rice. Be sure the rice is coated with olive oil.

Add pureed pumpkin, herbs and chicken broth and stir to combine.

Cover and cook on low for 4 hours, stir once at the 2 hour mark.

After 4 hour cooking is completed, stir in the grated Parmesan cheese and roasted pumpkin chunks. Stir it all together, cover and let sit for another 5 - 10 minutes, then serve and enjoy.

Instructions for Roasting a Pumpkin

Pre-heat oven to 400°F.

Quarter, seed, and peel the pumpkin.

Cut into chunky 1" cubes.

Place pumpkin into a large & sturdy roasting tray.

Add the olive oil, salt, pepper & cumin - mix well, making sure that all the pumpkin pieces are coated in olive oil.

Bake in the oven for about 30 to 45 minutes or until the pumpkin is soft & also tinged brown at the edges.

Puree in food processor. If liquid is needed, use chicken stock.

Sheryl Thompson

Sheryl Thompson is a mother, grandmother, artist, gardener, avid crafter, and homemaker. She and her husband, Bill I live on a small “farmette” in a tiny town called Sherman, Maine. Sherman is in the heart of logging and potato country, about 90 miles north of Bangor. Small (population of 450) and remote but incredibly beautiful , Sherman has picturesque views of Mount Katahdin, the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, about 20 miles to the west. Their little “piece of heaven” has an incredible view of the mountain and all the rest of Baxter State Park from our front porch. They live on 60 acres of rugged but beautiful woods and fields with their dog, Spirit, and their two cats Chucky and CJ, and a couple of dozen Buff Orpington chickens. You can read more at The Wilderness Wife.

November :: Acorn Squash

Growing Acorn Squash

In November, some of the diversity of the late summer's harvest begins to dwindle, but we can still rely on some wonderful root and squash crops to truly embrace eating with the seasons. There certainly are plenty of squashes to choose from – butternut, hubbard, spaghetti, delicata, and turban to name a few. However, my personal favorite is the delicate, nutty-sweet acorn squash. Acorn squash is easy to grow and can be added to many hearty recipes – soups, pastas, roasted veggie medleys – but perhaps the best way to fall in love with acorn squash is to bake it and add a simple maple glaze.

Acorn squash prefers soil rich in organic matter and should be planted in an open, sunny site the first week after the danger of frost has past. However, it can continue to be planted in the

3-4 weeks following the last frost. The squash will sprawl over the ground, but can also be trained to grow up an A-Frame trellis or tripod to support vertical growth. The plant will germinate within 7-14 days and will take 75-120 days to become mature. Squash is a heavy feeder and should be fertilized twice during the growing season. Try adding compost or manure tea when the fruit first sets.

Planting

Mound dirt into small hills and sow seeds ½" - 1" deep every 3' – 4'. Keep the seeds evenly moist, especially after the fruit has begun to set. Sow 2-6 seeds in each mound and remove the weaker sprouts so that only 1 or 2 remain. Squash can be interspersed with corn so the vines can use the cornstalks as climbing poles.

Harvest

Squash can be left on the vine until just before the first frost. The fruit are ready to be harvested when the stems begin to split and wither, or when the shells are hard. Fruits intended for storage should have harder shells and can be left on until frost is expected. Use a sharp knife to cut the vine 3"-4" from the fruit. Acorn squash is the only squash that doesn't need to be cured. Do not wash squash that you intend to store.

Potential Pests/Diseases

Most often, squash diseases and pests can be avoided by choosing high-quality seeds, rotating crops, choosing sites with good air circulation, and by maintaining a diverse garden. However, here are some things to watch out for:

- Slugs can eat through the stems if left unchecked.
- Cucumber mosaic virus is the most serious of squash diseases. The leaves become mottled and the fruit distorted. Destroy any infected plants.
- Powdery mildew can be a problem in dry years, but can generally be ignored as it is not a serious threat.
- Squash vine borers are 1"-long white caterpillars. They are difficult to detect until they've made the vine wilt, so look out for entry holes at the base of plants that will be surrounded by yellow, sawdust-like droppings. If you see this, cut a slit along infected stems and remove and destroy the larvae inside.
- Handpick all ¾"-long, grayish brown squash bugs and destroy their red-brown egg clusters on the undersides of leaves.

Companion Plants: Nasturtiums, radishes, and marigolds all help to prevent squash bugs. Sunflowers are also thought to be good companion plants.

Antagonist Plants: Potatoes

Other Tips:

- When vines grow about 5', pinch off the growing tips to encourage fruit-bearing side shoots.
- To avoid rot, keep maturing fruit off the soil with a board or thick mulch.
- Acorn squash will keep for several months if kept at 50-55 degrees F.

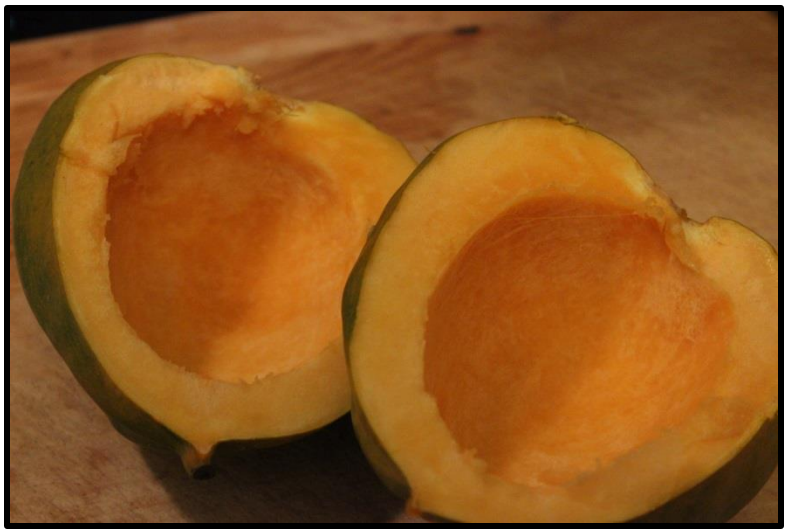
Recipe: Maple-Glazed Acorn Squash

This is a simple, yet delicious way to enjoy acorn squash in a pleasantly sweet glaze. This will become a favorite comfort food that is also fun to eat as it is baked in its own acorn-shaped bowl!

Yield: 2 Servings

Ingredients

- 1 medium acorn squash, halved
- 1.5 cups water
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- 2 Tbs. brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger (although it turns out ok without this)
- ¼ teaspoon salt



Instructions

Use a spoon to scoop out the seeds (you can save them to bake just like pumpkin seeds). Place

the squash cut side down in a 13-in. x 9-in. baking dish and add water to the bottom. Bake, uncovered, at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes.

Drain water from bottom of the pan and turn squash to be cut side up. Combine the syrup, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and salt in a bowl. Score the inside of the squash with a knife or poke with a fork to help let the sauce penetrate. Pour the sauce onto the squash halves.

Bake, uncovered, 10 minutes more or until glaze is heated through.

Christine Cassella

Christine is an ever-evolving collection of adjectives, but currently describes herself as a biologist, permaculturist, herbalist, and urban homesteader. Mainly, she is someone who likes to live with the Earth in mind – both to protect the Earth for the benefit of future generations, and as a reflection of spirit. She blogs about finding spirit in nature, urban homesteading, and other topics related to green living and sustainability at: http://theselightfootsteps.com.

December :: Jerusalem Artichoke

Growing Jerusalem Artichokes

Jerusalem Artichokes, (*Helianthus tuberosus*), also known as Sunchokes, are a member of the Daisy family. They are used as a root vegetable. The tubers resemble Ginger Root. The skin is brown and the inside is a creamy white. The Sunchokes has a sweet, nutty flavor. This delicious root vegetable can be roasted, fried or eaten raw in salads. It is lower in starch and considered a better choice than potatoes for diabetics.

To grow Jerusalem Artichokes, start by preparing the garden bed by adding compost and turning the soil. Plant tubers 4 inches deep, 12-18 inches apart. We planted ours in the fall but they can be planted in the spring. You can start to harvest the Sunchokes in the fall, but the flavor is improved after a few frosts. It is best to eat them fresh or store them in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator, a root cellar, dried or pickled. Late August into September, these plants flower. They have a beautiful yellow almost Sunflower appearance. They are small in diameter but probably just as tall as Sunflowers. They are beautiful. The plants die back and can be left to dry so the birds can eat from the dried flowers.

Recipe: Roasted Cornish Hen with Sunchokes and Carrots

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Wash the freshly harvested Sunchokes & Carrots. Cut into bite size chunks, place in the roasting pan. Drizzle olive oil over the vegetables. In a small bowl mix salt, pepper, parsley and sage; no specific amounts. Sprinkle over the vegetables. Using your hands, mix the vegetables, olive oil and seasonings until well coated. Prepare the Cornish Hen. Rub olive oil over the hen. Using the same seasonings, rub the hen. Cover the roasting pan. Place in the oven and roast for about 40-45 minutes. Uncover, check the hen for doneness. Leave uncovered so the hen can brown. The vegetables should be soft. Serve with a salad. Enjoy!

Teresa Arsenault

The Radishgirl Thymes' blog is "Simply Living Life", on their property. They try to use the property to its fullest. The have a huge garden and grow everything organic. They raise chickens for eggs. The firewood is from the property. Teresa enjoys cooking, baking, knitting, raising chickens and tending to the garden. She also likes to make lip balms, lotions and tinctures.

“You don't have to cook fancy or complicated masterpieces - just good food from fresh ingredients.”

— Julia Child