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Sprouting Memories

By late August, we knew we would not win out over the mice, voles, ground squirrels, gophers, and an occasional rabbit harvesting the garden. I tried various solutions all summer and gained enough victory that we had lettuce, spinach, a few edible pod peas, green onions, and carrots. When we left for vacation in mid-August, the word got out that the garden was undefended, and when we came back, there was little left to harvest.

Though vegetables fresh from the garden are high on my list of necessities, when it becomes impossible to obtain them, I resort to other methods to obtain fresh, low-cost vegetables for the table.

I went to the cupboard and found some alfalfa seeds. I covered the bottom of a quart jar with the tiny seeds, added water, stirred until the seeds settled to the bottom, and left them to soak overnight. I also put lentils and kidney beans in jars to soak.

My beginnings with sprouting seeds are shrouded in the mists of history, but my attempt to live almost entirely on sprouts is clear in my memory. I planned to travel from California into Oregon to look for land to buy.

My friend, Chip, temporarily unencumbered by a job, asked if he could go along, and I said sure, if he was willing to exist as I planned to exist, with a row of gallon jars across the back seat of the car, with seeds in various stages of sprouting. I planned to have sprouts to eat and little else, in an effort to keep expenses down. Chip was willing to give sprouts a try.

A few pounds of seeds go a long way, since the ready-to-eat sprouts are many times the weight and bulk of the dry seeds. I took along alfalfa seeds, mung beans, pinto beans, two kinds of wheat, garbanzo beans, corn, lentils, and hulled sunflower seeds.

Chip said he had enough money to buy us something different to eat once in a while to break the monotony. I said there wouldn't be any monotony. As long as we maintained the right attitude, that our food was healthy and sufficient, it would be enough. We could live on sprouts and direct our attention toward locating affordable property.

Chip decided to go anyway, filled his wallet as best he could, and stashed a five pound bag of granola somewhere in our luggage.

We soaked seeds overnight, drained them, and then rinsed them twice a day. We ate sprouts five or six times a day as we worked our way north, looking at land as we went.

About the third day, Chip dug out his sack of granola and ate some of it, dry. "I'm just too hungry to keep going if I don't eat something besides

sprouts,” He said.

He held the sack out toward me, offering to share, but I said “I want to see if I can keep going on sprouts alone.” I had plenty of energy and, other than feeling half hungry all the time, no signs of not having enough food.

“We’ll have to stop at a store,” Chip said. “I can probably eat about 80 percent sprouts, but I got to have some other stuff to fill in. Okay if I buy other stuff?”

“Sure.”

Wheat sprouts taste like watermelon and ball up and last like chewing gum. Popcorn sprouts are sweeter than anything else I have ever tasted, too sweet to eat much of, better used as an accent mixed in with other sprouts. Growing in sunlight, sprouts green up nicely.

We outran spring several times and waited for it to move north. Chip said, “We’ve seen spring come four times already. If we keep going north, we’ll see it again. I like seeing spring take over from winter. I’d like to do this every year.”

I learned that I was naive about land prices. The small windfall I had was not enough. I learned that tarps under and over our sleeping bags were sufficient against frost, snow, and rain. We didn’t need a tent.

I learned that we couldn’t get too far ahead of spring, or I’d have to get up in the night once or twice, start the car, and run the heater to keep the sprouts from freezing. I learned that it doesn’t necessarily matter if I achieve the goals I set out to achieve, as long as I find and appreciate the adventures that come my way. I learned that I probably could live on sprouts alone. I would be lean, full of energy, and eating all the time.

Now, years later, I’m not trying to use sprouts alone. I’m including them in our diet so we’ll have high quality, fresh vegetables, and we’ll keep the grocery bills down.

Sprouted kidney beans cook in a few minutes, and they are at least as good as those cooked without sprouting. I use them for chile beans.

All sprouts, but especially those from the larger seeds, are good in any kind of casserole. Sprouted lentils, alfalfa seeds, garbanzo beans, popcorn, and sunflower seeds all make welcome additions to salad. A full plate of almost any kind of sprouts, with some of a favorite dressing, is a very acceptable substitute for a salad made from store-bought vegetables. Sprouts go well in sandwiches.

Everyone in my family participates in sprouting seeds. Rinse and drain. Refrigerate any mature sprouts that we don’t immediately eat. “We have plenty of lentil sprouts. Eat a lot of lentil sprouts today, and we won’t start any for a couple of days.”

“We used to use garbanzo beans. They’re really good. Let’s get garbanzo beans.”

We sprout a variety of seeds and eat them daily. We sprout a variety of memories. We sprout our way through this deep winter toward spring.