

## The Harvest

When we moved to Talkeetna in 1977, we lived off the grid, up a 2 mile long dirt road that was not plowed in the winter and barely maintained in the summer. There were only 5 of us in 1977, and we spent most of our time building a house, cutting firewood, shoveling snow, and keeping warm. We got a "pantry list" from Dorothy Jones, who owned the Talkeetna Grocery on Main Street and later became the mayor of the Mat-Su Borough. The list included enough dry and canned goods to last us through the long winter, from late September to early May.

I was basically a city girl. I grew up just outside New York City. There were grocery stores within walking distance, and we had about 10 days' worth of food in the house at any given time. Shopping for 8 months was an amazing thought!

After a few years of "proving up" the property, and 2 more children later, we were ready to plant a garden. We cleared some brush from a fairly flat and open area by the house, rototilled a couple of dozen times, and we were ready to plant!

And it was a gorgeous summer and garden. I read books, became a big fan of Wayne and Mann Leiser, Ann Roberts, Lenore Hedla, and Lois Hole, and I started seeds inside way too early. I visited the greenhouses in Anchorage in April just to smell the dirt!

The garden was bountiful. We had peas, zucchinis, rutabagas, beans, cabbage, potatoes, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower- some of which I had never eaten or even heard of!

As September rolled around, I was warned to start harvesting, buy a pressure canner, and stock up on canning jars. People asked me, "Are you going to freeze or can your produce?" I answered, "We're going to eat it!" They always had a confused look on their faces, and repeated the question, "Freeze or can?"

They had not really seen our garden. It was very green, pretty well weeded, but the pea plants were mostly stripped of pods, there were only 2 or 3 cabbages left, and the rest of the garden had been devoured by us through the summer. Every time the kids- or an adult- would go out, they'd grab a handful of whatever was closest and enjoy it on the spot.

It was a wonderful time- we felt such great satisfaction about growing a garden. The first time we had a meal completely grown in own plot, we took pictures and wrote letters to our parents about our amazing feat!

These days, I still have my canner. Its seal looks the elastic on old underwear I used it mostly to make jellies and sometimes we canned moose. But we never used the root cellar we dug- it was too creepy to go into!

We still grow a garden every year. And we mostly just eat it.

Our garden does not provide for winter sustenance but it certainly produces good times!

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