

Spring Clean Up – sort of

Well I did spend half a day on the garage, giving it what my mother referred to as ‘a lick and a promise’. And the rest?-- not only do I have a bumper crop of weeds outside but inside, the gardening files are bulging from merely fat to obese. Such interesting tidbits add up to information overload. Even walking in my small neighborhood, I see all kinds of fascinating garden ideas, raised beds, rock gardens, planting on steep slopes.

It is good to see more people growing food. All you need is a patch with six hours of sun daily. Isn't it great that gardens are the new ‘in’ thing? In a clipping sent from Winston-Salem, N.C. I learned about their community garden initiative. Called “Reap More Than You Sow” the Winston-Salem community initiative began last year and is deemed a resounding success. The funding that came from gifts, grants, and in-kind donations provided the materials needed to grow food in neighborhoods.

There were four Reap More gardens that donated over 7500 pounds of fresh food to Second Harvest Food Bank and other groups. That amount was 25% of the garden produce: the rest went to the families of the garden workers/volunteers. Each garden had a Master Gardener helping a group of volunteers, diverse in age and skills.

Also from that area comes news of a composting technique called Hugelkultur, a sheet composting method. It starts with a layer of woody debris; next comes layered chopped or slashed vegetation; than addition of dried coarse compost made of straw, leaves, or wood chips; and finally compost, manure, or soil. Interestingly, this Hugelkultur was part of an exhibition, ‘EnviroPassion’ at a local art gallery, linking art, nature, and experience. It appears that the borders between our different worlds are melting. This sounds a fine idea for an entrepreneur with a large lot as the raw materials are surely around and the finished product always in demand. Not something that would enhance your suburban lot, do you think?

If you are determined to plant your tomatoes before Memorial Day, go ahead. I expect we have had enough hot days to warm the soil sufficiently. If you eat eggs and grow tomatoes, smush the egg shells and scatter them around your tomato seedlings. The calcium from the shells will help prevent blossom end rot the ailment that matches its name and is caused by irregular watering and calcium shortage.

Where’s the beef?

From all sides - health gurus, ecologists, climatologists – we are urged to reduce our over-consumption of meat. If your memory of Sunday dinner goes back a few decades, you may recall that the steak that fed a small family is the approximate size of what is plunked on one plate for a hearty eater at his favorite steak house.

Setting aside the health problems of portion size, we can study the impact of air, water, and land pollution. Beef is good but somewhere along the way moderation was lost so that intensively raised animals replaced pasture-raised beef. Rainforests, essential for climate

moderation, were destroyed to supply the world's ever-increasing demand for beef. This destruction attracted the attention of scientists concerned about the climate.

As we learned in grade school, we are what we eat and in eating grain-fed beef we are incorporating, not good fats, but Omega-6. Grass is what cattle innards are designed to digest and when fed grain they suffer from excess Omega-6 in their flesh, that in turn damages the health of consumers.

There are many health benefits from eating grass-fed beef. It is lower in fat, especially the saturated fats linked with heart disease, higher in beta-carotene and vitamin E, the B vitamins and calcium, magnesium, and potassium. Most important, it is higher in the essential fatty acid, Omega 3 that promotes a healthy heart.

Many people gave up eating beef when they learned about the wretched lives the cattle endured and the over-use of antibiotics and hormones used to ward off the problems their confinement created. They will be delighted to find home grown, locally raised beef for purchase. Do boys in 4-H raise a calf as a rite of passage any more? I remember them doing that and I also remember when the calf became a pet rather than food for the storage locker. Every endeavor has its own pluses and minuses.