

## **Vegetables ARE Ornamental!**

In looking over the spots in my garden that get plenty of sun all summer long, I was trying to imagine an eggplant here, a pepper plant there, perhaps a pole bean sharing the arbor with 'Aloha'. Unfortunately that rose has such murderous prickles, those beans might never be picked. Because I am conditioned to think vegetables belong in tidy tilled rectangles, it is difficult for me to think outside the cliché. I shall try.

Vegetable plants are beautiful: surely they can be grown in a sunny border without countervailing the charm of zinnias and petunias? An edging of plump lettuces is as attractive as an edging of sedums, don't you think? A few Brussels sprouts would add charm to a group of grasses. Brussels sprouts produce a three to four foot stalk with a fluffy spread of foliage on top and hugging that stalk are tiny green cabbages. You pick from the bottom to the top over a long period. Steamed when young, they are delectable.

Park Seed catalog has a patty pan summer squash 'Balmoral' that is white, pure white and grows along the stem like Brussels sprouts. It looks like a ruffled parasol and is tender even if it gets 6 to 8 inches in diameter. This squash stays about 2 ft in a container, larger in the garden.

Lovely peppers, both cool and hot-hot, come in as many colors as annuals and in exotic shapes which would grace any container collection. Another vegetable that is not only a fine nutritional substitute for meat but a handsome plant is eggplant. It too comes in new colors, white and shiny black and shades between. Since they don't keep well – they get 'spongy' in stores – it is great to have a source in your garden.

Lent began yesterday and that put me in the vegetable gardening mode. Lent means researching recipes for meatless soup: it is a challenge to concoct a sturdy soup that does not begin with a large bone or a small hen. One recipe I tried had the usual vegetables plus squash, turnips, parsnips and apples! Growing up I loathed parsnips so I was apprehensive about the results. It was delicious right out of the pot, better the next day and I hope it will survive its sojourn in the freezer. Usually if I plan to freeze soup I leave out potatoes: they can dissolve.

In my recipe quest I reread a 1986 vegetarian cookbook (The New Laurel's Kitchen) and found the section on nutrition and health to be frighteningly prophetic. There is mention of a study that found children watching cartoons were in a sort of metabolic "hibernation" where no calories are needed. Unsurprising, twenty years along we have obesity in children. Of course we all know children don't need TV: they need gardens, vegetable gardens!

### **CABBAGES & KINGS**

According to one study carbonated soft drinks are the largest source of calories in our daily diets. Additionally these sugary elixirs don't satisfy our sweet tooth but actually reinforce our cravings. I do not understand the science that may support this but the most damaging aspect of these 52 gallons per person that we consume each year is the high fructose sugar they contain. It seems that it is largely metabolized in the liver which can turn sugar into fat. That tends to take the fun out of the pause that refreshes, doesn't it? We are tired of hearing that the plastic bottles soft drinks come in are a problem. It is so much easier to toss them than to take them back for a refund even though we know that refillable beer and pop bottles would mean a 90% reduction in both the material used and the carbon emissions in the beverage industry. Would it help if we gave them up for Lent and stuck to water?

Perhaps it would not. There is more disconcerting information. In our country alone manufacturing the 25 to 28 billion plastic bottles water comes in uses 17 million barrels of oil which rises to 50 million barrels a

year if you add in delivery etc. But the romance of designer water is fading. San Francisco prohibits using city funds to buy water and in New York City a huge and expensive ad campaign is underway to promote its tap water, which is excellent. What galvanized the city to act was the chaos caused by those huge bottled-water-delivery trucks clogging NYC's narrow streets.

Are you willing to wager that it won't be long before some smart entrepreneur invents a lightweight, easily cleaned, designer thermos?