

Better Have Another

Written by Ben Hewitt

Wednesday, 01 June 2016 00:00 - Last Updated Friday, 15 September 2017 07:27

The first of the blueberries are coming in now, and most mornings one of us stops by the patch on our way in from chores to snag a handful or three. We planted the 90-something bushes 16 years ago, before we'd even broken ground on the house. This struck me as nothing short of insane at the time—after all, we were living in a musty and dilapidated rental shack with no running water other than what leaked through the roof during thunderstorms—but as is so often the case, Penny knew better than I. She is one of those people graced with the ability to envision a future I can only blindly lurch toward; likewise, she knew that bare-root blueberry whips take at least five years to produce and she knew of the Chinese proverb that says “the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” In her wisdom, Penny understood that this proverb also applies to fruit-bearing bushes, and that in five years, the days we spent digging and planting would have been long forgotten, while the annual flush of berries would feel like a gift that won't stop giving.



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This is the first year in the decade since the bushes became prolific that we didn't run out of the produce our own's house before the current flush began. In fact, just last week we emptied the last quart down our insalubric gutters. We usually have 15 or 20 quarts of blueberries, plus maybe 20 quarts of strawberries, plus another 20 or so quarts of wild blackberries. Yeah, we eat a lot of berries, in no small part because they're essentially free. The original bare-root blueberry whips we planted all three years ago cost us less than a buck and have required maybe another dime or so in fertilizer upkeep. Since then, we've picked and eaten at least a couple thousand quarts, and sold that much again. There's not a single food manager at our market who wouldn't kill to get that kind of volume.

Berries are one of the few food items we produce that we don't generally run out of at some point during the year. I was thinking about this the other day when we filled up a bowl of blueberry-topped new potatoes and I said to Penny that the patch. They were the first potatoes we'd eaten in quite some time, one week and a day back in March or so, and so long after the 20 pounds or so of them I'd had to be also disappointed. Since then, we've been a different story. The same goes for most everything around here. When we dig off the corn, we don't think much until they're fresh again. (By the way, however, continue to eat the butter we've made and frozen.) When we've picked them

the last of the tomatoes from the winter greenhouse, we don't eat salad until the first early shoots of lettuce in late April or early May. When the carrots are gone, they're gone. If we run out of beef, we eat chicken. If we run out of chicken, we eat sausage. If we run out of sausage, we eat... well, usually that's totally unacceptable. We never allow ourselves to run out of sausage.

We don't do this out of pride or even ingenuity. We could also buy potatoes in a grocery store, or salad in a market, or milk wherever. We also a goodly portion of our food—I'd guess somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 percent—but we're not desperate about it. If we want to buy something to eat, we damn well buy something to eat.

Here's the thing: We don't want to buy those things, if only because by going without them for a time, our appreciation of them and appreciation for them grows. If you eat potatoes every day, they're just potatoes. Fried, baked and broiled, it's all the same. Although a few folks report of some demand for them during a certain magic weekend. If you have salad every day, it's just salad. I mean, really, when's the last time you started thinking over a bowl of mixed greens?

Here's the other thing: If you go five or six months without using a potato, a funny thing happens: You cook the potato, you cook potato to it, you build an altar for it, you think it's as beautiful as the smiling faces of your children as you rejoice. You are grateful for it in a way you'd almost forgotten you could be grateful for something so small, so humble, so graceful in its simplicity and poignancy.

You almost don't even know eat thinking... but of course you do. Of course, it is the best potato you've ever had! It's best the way Cinderella. Maybe. Better than another just to be sure. 🍌

“THE BEST TIME TO PLANT A TREE IS 20 YEARS AGO. THE SECOND BEST TIME IS NOW.”



Ben and Penny Hewitt are realizing that the case of time is the control of a life-saving process known colloquially as eating. They believe that contemporary, individualized American agricultural systems create “infinite right of access” and do not allow for the history of food and spirit. The Hewitt family plans to always remain as committed to soil as possible, and often for as much profit as possible. They do not own a television. Visit their website and other information: www.gothicgardens.com or www.gothicgardens.com.

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This is the first year in the decade since the bushes became prolific that we didn't run out of the previous season's frozen berries before the current flush began. In fact, just last week we emptied the last quart down our insatiable gullets. We generally freeze 100 or more quarts of blueberries, plus maybe 20 quarts of strawberries, plus another 20 or so quarts of wild blackberries. Yeah, we eat a lot of berries, in no small part because they're essentially free: The original bare-root blueberry whips we planted all those years ago cost us less than \$500, and have required maybe another \$100 or so in fertility upkeep. Since then, we've picked and eaten at least a couple thousand quarts, and sold that much again. There's not a hedge fund manager alive who wouldn't kill for that kind of return.

Berries are one of the few food items we produce that we don't generally run out of at some point during the year. I was thinking about this the other day, when we dined on a bowl of liberally buttered new potatoes we'd snuck from the tater patch. They were the first potatoes we'd eaten in quite some time; our stash ran dry back in March or so, and not long after, the 20 pounds or so a friend gifted to us also disappeared. Since then, we've been taterless.

The same goes for most everything around here. When we dry off the cows, we don't drink milk until they're fresh again. (We do, however, continue to eat the butter we've made and frozen.) When we've picked clean the last of the claytonia from the winter greenhouse, we don't eat salad until the first early shoots of lettuce in late April or early May. When the carrots are gone, they're gone. If we run out of beef, we eat chicken. If we run out of chicken, we eat sausage. If we run out of sausage, we eat...no, actually, that's totally unacceptable. We never allow ourselves to run out of sausage.

We don't do this out of pride, or even frugality. We could afford to buy potatoes in summer, or salad in winter, or milk whenever. We raise a goodly portion of our food—I'd guess somewhere in the neighborhood of 80 percent— but we're not dogmatic about it. If we want to buy something to eat, we damn well buy something to eat.

"the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now."

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Here's the thing: We don't want to buy these things, if only because by going without them for a time, our anticipation of them and appreciation for them grows. If you eat potatoes every day, they're just potatoes: Kinda bland and boring, truth be told, although a few tablespoons of home-churned butter does bring a certain magic to them. If you have salad every day, it's just salad. I mean, really, when's the last time you started drooling over a bowl of mixed greens?

Here's the other thing. If you go four or five months without eating a potato, a funny thing happens: You covet the potato, you read poems to it, you build an altar for it, you think it's as beautiful as the smiling faces of your children or your spouse. You are grateful for it in a way you'd almost forgotten you could be grateful for something so small, so humble, so graceful in its simplicity and proportions.

You almost don't even dare eat the thing...but of course you do. Of course. Is it the best potato you've ever had? It's hard to say. Could be. Might be. Better have another just to be sure.



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