



Garlic

At this time of the year, I am up close and personal with garlic, dill and small cucumbers. It is all in aid of making the winter supply of pickles and home grown or locally purchased is the way to go. The garlic sometimes comes from one of my perennial flower beds. I think it originally appeared when old garlic cloves were passed from the compost bin to the bed and found a likeable site to grow.

markets sell less than 10 varieties.' This is cause for concern not only for taste but for the genetic biodiversity of the tomato.

'Brandywine' is one that has been around for awhile and I have found it to be reliable. It produces ugly, not quite red tomatoes but I like the meaty texture.

One that I have sampled, but not yet grown is 'Red Currant Organic' (seed offered by several sources. This sprawling plant has clusters of tiny tomatoes, and I mean tiny, currant-sized fruit that taste amazing. I believe it is a native of Mexico and I plan to make a big space next year for this plant.



Okra

Every year or two, I have a bumper crop and although the heads are not large enough to keep a vampire at bay, the flavour is great.

This year I purchased the cukes and dill from The Farm on 15 Sideroad, Stewarttown, one of my haunts for summer produce.

I do grow my own cucumbers now and again and the one I prefer for my dill pickles is the heirloom variety called 'National Pickling'. There are many newer cultivars available, but I guess I am a bit traditional. These cukes hold a good consistency even if the jar sits for a year or two! The trick when growing these cucumbers is never to let any of them mature on the vine as the plant will stop producing and your yield will be reduced.

Okra or gumbo is the last veggie that I will write about. Rated as exotic in many gardens, I grew up with okra on the dinner table as my mom is from Arkansas and fried okra was a staple in hot summer months. You are actually eating the seed pod of Hibiscus esculentus which is a surprise to most. The plants are easy to raise and thrive in the hottest weather.

There are so many other favourite plant vegetables—'Nantes II Organic' carrots, 'Detroit Dark Red' beets, 'Sangria' lettuce and on and on. And there are the scores of new things we are trying in the Veggie Village project, including some spectacular oriental vegetables like tatsoi which is so pretty in shape I



Tatsoi

couldn't pick it.

I read somewhere that for the first time since the Second World War sales of vegetable seeds exceeded that of flower seeds. I guess we all are starting to eat a bit of the sun.

Take a local veg pledge

Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington wants you to make a local veg pledge. As part of its latest demonstration garden installation — Veggie Village: 100 mile produce gardens — RBG is asking people to promise to select locally grown foods when planning their weekly menus.

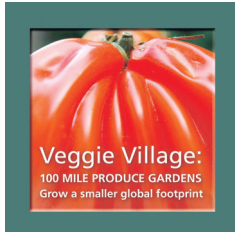
"It's not enough to simply ask someone to think about eating locally," says RBG head of horticulture Belinda Gallagher, "a pledge carries a whole lot more weight."

The point of the promise is to help reduce our collective carbon footprint. By not trucking in melons from Mexico or carrots from California we reduce the emissions released by burning fossil fuels to get the goods from point A (far away) to Point B (right here, you see).

In addition to the ecological sense of the pledge, there are some excellent practical benefits. In almost all cases, local means fresher, tastier, healthier.

"I just picked up a basket of organic tomatoes at my local farmer's market," said Gallagher. "They are the tastiest things imaginable. Believe me, those tomatoes will make it into just about every dinner this week."

And that mini-menu plan— a tomato a day— is a great way to introduce the pledge. Gallagher simply wants you to promise to use locally grown food in at least one meal a week for the next year. It's that easy. You can take the pledge online at www.rbg.ca. Take a sneak peek and visit the seven themed demonstration gardens — from Grandmother's Garden, On the Balcony to Herbal Delight — at Veggie Village in Hendrie Park.



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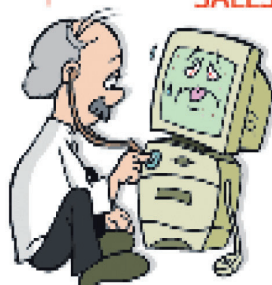
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