

HOME & GARDEN



Stocking up

The woodpiles at a wood supply company in Montpelier, Vt., left, are growing as the firm stocks up for an influx of winter orders. Arthur Drown, of Northfield, Vt., above, takes a break from his wood-chopping chores.

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Saving produce for winter meals

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

For a while I loved over a Korean green grocer in New York City. With each season there were fewer or more of various fruits and vegetables, but there was never a time I couldn't have peaches, strawberries or zucchini if I was so inclined even if the slush was deep on the sidewalks. Naturally we ate with the seasons to a degree simply because it was cheaper, but now that I am back in the country and trying very hard to raise the larger part of our food supply, we really know what it is to eat with the seasons.

With a producing garden we don't want anything to go to waste so peas are on the menu every night in early July and they are doubly welcome because in spite of the freezer we know they will only last a little while. Then come summer salads and summer squash. There is never any question what to have for supper, only how to have it so the peanut gallery won't sing out "not again" when they see me walking in from the garden.

Now we are rolling in tomatoes, beets and carrots. Winter squash, potatoes and horseradish are just coming in.

During the winter we eat everything we have been able to can or freeze, but time and space are limited so it is fortunate that there are some good winter keepers that need only the right conditions to insure that they last well into the winter and even next spring.

Last week I spoke about root vegetables that needed a dark, cold cellar to store well. This week I'll talk about those vegetables that have different requirements.

Chili peppers or other hot peppers need very little care. They can be picked and strung whole

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with a needle and heavy thread and hung in a warm dry room. In this case, warm merely means something warmer than the damp root cellar. An unheated spare bedroom where the temperature stays between 50 and 60 degrees would be ideal and the peppers will keep for about six months.

Winter squash is very undemanding and is a joy to grow and harvest. Pick the squash when it is mature; when a fingernail will not puncture the skin. Pick it carefully leaving the stem on. If a stem should break, use that squash soon because stemless squash will spoil quickly. Squash will stand some light frost, but be sure to pick it before a heavy frost does damage.

After picking, acorn squash can go right into storage at a temperature of 45 to 50 degrees. Try not to keep them at a temperature of over 55 or they will turn stringy.

Hubbard squash, on the other hand, needs to be cured before it is stored. During the curing process it will give up some moisture and will develop a hard rind, both of which will help it to keep longer. Pick the squash (leaving the stems intact) and lay them out on the lawn or a sunny porch. If frost seems likely, make sure they are covered at night and if they must be harvested during a rainy spell, bring them indoors where it is warm. The temperature should be over 70 degrees if you are going to cure them indoors. When they are cured, they should be stored in that ideal spare bedroom, although some people like Ruth Stout have been known to keep them under their own beds or in a

basket under the kitchen table. Handle them carefully so they don't bruise and store them in a single layer.

Pumpkins should get the same treatment as squash. Harvest them when they are fully ripe and take care to keep the stem intact. The only problem is that pumpkins require more humidity than squash and when this is not available, they will not keep as long. However, kept in an unheated room they will last for two or three months — at least until the harvest frenzy is passed. By then you might have more leisure to process and can the pumpkin for some good winter pie eating.

Green tomatoes are always abundant at the end of the season and there are a variety of ways to deal with them. If you have hay bales and a somewhat isolated tomato plant, it is even possible to build a mini-greenhouse. Stack the hay bales around the plant and top this little fortress with an old storm window. This should keep the plant producing for at least a month into the frost season.

You can also pull up the tomato plants, remove any damaged tomatoes and then hang the whole plant in a shed or unused room. The tomatoes will continue to ripen even though no longer growing in the ground.

Tomatoes that are nearly ripe can continue to ripen on a kitchen shelf and tomatoes that are very green can be wrapped carefully in newspaper and then stored for a couple of weeks. The newspaper will help trap the ethylene gas given off by the tomatoes and that will help them to ripen further. Watch them carefully, however, so that any tomatoes that start to spoil can be removed before any damage is done to the others.

And there is always green tomato chutney, but that is a column for another week.