

## **Growing Vegetables**

August 19, 2024

I have been growing my own vegetables for over 50 years, one way or another. When we lived on a bluff out by Lake Wisconsin, the soil was just terrible. I dubbed it 'Mother Nature's Cement.' We had dirt hauled in to a garden area near the driveway so I could have a vegetable garden. Now, the problem was that the edge of our woods, which was on the other side of the driveway, had been a deer path. Just because there was now a house there certainly did not alter the transit habits of the deer. Fortunately, we had a moderately sized dog named Corky who had lived on the farm and was used to spending her days outside. She managed to keep the deer at bay for several years. As she aged, we began to notice more deer. One day, when we arrived home, we found Corky snoozing on the patio in the front of the house, oblivious to the deer in the back yard munching on our apple trees. We moved to Madison shortly after this or we would have had to get a very tall fence.

In Madison, our yard is very shady. That creates a wonderful leafy canopy but does not work for growing vegetables. So the challenge was figuring out a place to garden. First I was invited to use garden space at my friends Dot and Carolyn's house. That was very kind of them and I gave that a try for a year or two, but they lived way out on County N, south of Sun Prairie – not a practical distance to maintain a garden. Then I was invited to share a plot with a friend in a community garden space fairly close to home. That was much more workable but still not right. There was not a large space, plus neither of these options really felt like mine.

Then I got a plot at the Community garden at Marlborough Park. That was much better. I quickly added a no-till plot to my tilled one. Mary Mullen dragged me onto the garden committee which actually worked out well because, at that time, the Master Gardener Association was hoping to get a Master Gardener working

with each of the forty plus community gardens in Dane County. (There are two or three of us at Marlborough.)

So you would think that this would produce enough vegetables for two people, but no. During my search for a suitable space to garden, we joined a CSA. That first one went under as did the next two. We finally joined Harmony Valley and still get a share of vegetables every-other week. You might think this is crazy which it probably is, but they offer things that I don't grow including ramps every spring, which I had never had before and now dearly love. We also have come to look forward to getting stinging nettles which make a wonderful spring soup when carefully handled so that they don't bite back! We also know who will enjoy what we don't use such as Jerusalem artichokes and hot peppers.

Somehow I have learned to use all of this varied produce. Whatever we can't eat fresh or share with our kids or others, we freeze or can. Not too surprisingly, I rarely have to buy a vegetable.