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The following pieces are in continuation of the answer to the prompt: "Choose any vegetable we grow and write about it -- memoir, fiction, poetry, recipes."

Bean Patches are Conference Rooms, Therapist Offices and Alcohol-Free Pubs

by Hana Newcomb

We solve the world's problems while sitting in the bean patch. We plan our futures, we talk about our pasts. We wish for milkshakes and we settle for warm water without really feeling disappointed.

Bean patches are full of memories. I didn't start picking beans willingly until I was 13. Before that, picking beans was boring, tedious, hot and slow. But Saroj, a worker so full of joy and laughter and warmth, she loved picking beans more than anything and I loved to be near her so I was lured into the patch. And 44 years later I am still happy to be between two rows of gorgeous bean plants, steadily filling my basket, either alone or with others.



The Allis-Chalmers "G" going strong at 70 years old – so is Hana at 57.

My father always said beans were the perfect vegetable. He was talking as someone who grew beans, not strictly as a consumer. We plant the seeds with a machine attached to a small tractor – very simple. They germinate easily and they grow fast. We control weeds with a 1947 Farmall B or a 1949 Allis Chalmers G, two of

our favorite little tractors that were designed for vegetables – you can see everything from the seat as you straddle two rows, the cultivator shovels scraping out the weeds and leaving the beans in clean rows behind you. The weeds that are growing in the same rows as the beans need to be pulled by hand, or we just leave them. If

the bean beetles don't demolish them first, beans are ready to pick in eight weeks. And that is a perfect vegetable.

Dad bought a bean picking machine and a bean sorting table and for many years the bean picking process was noisy and fraught. He loved it. When he died, we eventually gave up the mechanical toys because they were getting old and they really didn't suit us. Sorting beans took eight people standing around a loudly vibrating metal table, picking out the rocks and sticks and weed stalks as they marched past – it was way too loud to talk so we had to shout. Riding the bean picker was also stressful, sitting on the back of a very long and

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Asparagus On Toast: My Favorite

by Amy Page

I grew up eating many different vegetables, mostly processed or prepared in simple Midwestern methods or recipes. My mother's cooking is highly influenced by her mother's cooking and thus so is mine. Many of the vegetable dishes in my kitchen are simply sautéed, roasted, steamed, or eaten raw. Two of my favorites are asparagus and Brussels sprouts. Both of these veggies are associated with my childhood and happy memories, especially asparagus. I always knew that it was late spring and the beginning of the summer growing season when the farmers market opened and we started seeing those green stalks for sale. Some of my favorite things to do with asparagus are: roasting the stalks, asparagus soup, and asparagus on toast. Asparagus on toast is my favorite spring meal. It's something I grew up eating and it's something I look forward to every spring. Here's the recipe so you can make it next year!

Asparagus on Toast (in three parts)

Place your toast on the plate, top it with asparagus, and add the cheese sauce on top of the stalks.

Steamed Asparagus

1. Wash asparagus stalks and snap off the tough ends (compost them!).
2. I use a vegetable steamer basket, but it is not required. Put about three or four inches of water into your saucepan and add asparagus stalks. Put a lid on the saucepan and steam it over medium heat until the stalks are tender- perhaps about 6-8 minutes. Check the tenderness with a fork. You don't want them to be mushy, just tender.
3. Once your stalks are tender, turn off the heat and empty the water out of your pan.

Cheese Sauce (béchamel sauce with cheddar)

- 2 tbsp butter, 2 tbsp all purpose flour, 1 1/4 cup milk, salt & pepper to taste, about 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
1. Over medium heat, melt the butter and stir in flour to make a paste.
 2. Slowly add milk making sure to incorporate it into the paste as added. The mix will thicken as it heats up. Stir constantly so that it doesn't stick or burn. Add the shredded cheese & stir until it is thoroughly melted. Add the salt & pepper to taste.

Toast: Toast your bread until it is golden brown on both sides.



Digging potatoes on an unseasonably comfortable August afternoon. While no one wrote about potatoes, we are all so happy to have a successful crop this year and we eat them at almost every potluck.

Prize Peas in August

by Michael Lipsky

Once, my brother started a garden in June on Martha's Vineyard, the island beach community off Cape Cod. He was renting for the summer—this was long before he and his family became all-year-round residents.

He planted a variety of vegetables, including peas. In August, he took six or so of the most attractive pods and entered his peas in the competition at the West Tisbury agricultural fair. He won a blue ribbon for "Other Vegetables."

He won because no one

had told him you don't plant peas in June. In New England, as here in Virginia, you plant them in early spring, as soon as the ground can be worked. No doubt other gardeners had planted peas on Martha's Vineyard that year, but their peas were long gone. But he didn't know any better.

Or maybe he figured that with its ocean breezes and cool nights, Martha's Vineyard was the perfect place to grow peas in August.

In any event, the blue ribbon for best "other vegetables" is proudly displayed to this day at the family home on State Road.

All I Can Think About is TOMATOES



A classic tomato table in mid-summer at the Takoma Park Farmers Market.

by Ciara Prencipe

It's early August and it feels like such a cliché to write about tomatoes, but they're all I can think about. Some of them have been in the ground since April, and after waiting and waiting, now they're hitting their stride. This year in Vienna we have our classic reds, bright pinks, vibrant oranges, hearty paste tomatoes, dignified Cherokee purples, and a rainbow of cherry tomatoes. Just today we harvested over 50 half-bushels of tomatoes (that is a LOT of tomatoes from our patch). This year I've already brought home over 10 pounds of tomatoes, trying to take advantage of the crop while it lasts; once I tasted a farm fresh tomato, I could never go back to their shadows in the grocery stores. In fact, I never ever liked tomatoes until my very first night on a farm.

During college I took a gap year to work on farms abroad. My first destination was a farm in rural Portugal. I got in late, after a train, bus and taxi ride. Everyone was waiting for dinner in the worker's kitchen, a small stone building with no electricity, lit by candles. Angela, the farm owner, brought out what looked like a cauldron of bubbling tomato soup. I held the firm belief that I didn't like tomato soup (I'd never tried it before), but I was both hungry from the trip and worried I would be rude not to try it. This soup was so richly flavorful and comforting that it immediately changed my relationship with tomatoes. A month later, I asked Angela to make tomato soup for my birthday dinner.

Once I came to PVF, I had another tomato revelation: I love orange tomatoes. They have an impressive flesh to seed jelly ratio, not to mention their great flavor and beautiful color. Every day this week I've had some kind of tomato sandwich with an orange tomato. The two best were 1. A grilled cheese with mozzarella, cheddar, brisket, basil, and orange tomato, and 2. Just a plain old tomato (orange, of course) and cheese sandwich. I remember clearly, my first summer at PVF, Hana saying "this time of year we should all be eating at least 1 tomato sandwich a day", which clearly stuck with me.

I've also been trying out our paste tomatoes this year. I love to make homemade pizza, so I thought I'd try homemade pizza sauce, too. It turned out to be incredibly easy; the basic process is to halve the tomatoes (maybe with some onions, garlic, and a jalapeno if you like it spicy), roast at a high temp for ~30 minutes, and remove skins. Then pour all the flesh and juices into a pan and simmer off the excess liquid (bonus tomato points if you top your pizza with halved Juliets!) The same process goes to make pasta sauce, but usually I add some sausage or mushrooms to round out the flavors a bit. I would try to recreate my first experience with fresh tomatoes, but I know it won't measure up to Angela's life-changing tomato soup. But I will encourage you to try to make an amazing tomato soup, sandwich, or sauce, while the season lasts - we'll miss this amazing fruit when it's gone, until it's back again the next summer!

Tomatoes

by Jill Evans-Kavaldjian

Joan wanted things in July.
She wanted the baby to be born.
She wanted to be cool.
She wanted tomatoes.

On her way to the movies,
She parked by the farmer's roadside table
Ignoring the sweet corn and other nonsense.
She knew what she wanted.

The bag of tomatoes sat next to her
On the wide front seat, windows open,
She drove down the road, eating tomatoes.
Waiting and wanting.

Every hot Virginia day,
Eating tomatoes, one after another.
How can you eat so many? Her husband wondered.
She ate more.

One day she was full of tomatoes
And the baby finally came.
Joan would tell her,
I never wanted anything more.

Basil Pesto

by Misty Schepetin

Yesterday while it poured I filled the freezer with small containers of basil pesto. These I assure you will be tiny treasures come January. Pesto can be relished on hearty bread, spread on fried eggplant or fresh tomatoes slices, tossed in linguine or whatever Italian noodle you fancy and other ways I'm forgetting to mention. Below is an ingredient list from Rawia Bishara's Olives, Lemons & Za'atar, which will make approximately 2 cups of basil pesto.

- 3-5 garlic cloves
- one cup of pine nuts
- 2 Tablespoons of grated parmesan
- a teaspoon of black pepper
- pinch or two of salt
- 4 packed cups of fresh

basil leaves

- half cup of olive oil
- the juice of one lemon
- crushed red pepper (optional)

You could be kind to your food processor and put the ingredients in little by little, pulsing and then allowing the blades to rest or if you're like me than you'll throw everything in, turn on the amazing apparatus, walk away, wash dishes and come back to find smooth pesto awaiting you. Taste it, add what you think it needs more of, if anything. If you have any left over, pour a thin layer of olive oil on top of the pesto and refrigerate for up to ten days. And if you feel inclined, freeze a batch or two. Remember to label so you're not perplexed by the containers contents later on. Enjoy the harvest.



Above: Jon planting carrots with our fancy vacuum seeder – that's the easy part. Everything after that is hard, from germination to weeding and waiting for 100 days. Below: Shaia Rose, almost 4 weeks old, naps on the lettuce while she waits for market to open.



"Bean," cont. from page 1

unsteady platform at the end of a 30 foot long harvester, behind a huge fan that blew all the chewed up bean plants back into the field. The job was to switch the baskets as they filled – the machine could pick 50 bushels an hour with just a tractor driver up front and an anxious kid in the back. Part of the anxiety came from wondering what would come hurtling down the chute – snakes, rocks, toads. We did not love it.

We have conversations in all the patches, but beans just lend

themselves to long talks. It takes anywhere between 12 minutes (that's fast) and 45 minutes (normal for new pickers) to fill a basket. When the picking is good, we might stay out there until we have 30 or 40 baskets. That's a long time. There is no comparison, in terms of time, between mechanical vs. hand picking. But the quality of the beans is so much better and you can hear other people talking.

The most history-making bean pick happened when Ellen came to visit almost 30 years ago – she had

worked on the farm as a teenager and had gone to California with her farm boyfriend, then returned to Virginia with a different boyfriend and had tried farming a one acre CSA plot and was frustrated by her lack of working capital. She despaired of ever being able to afford to farm. On a brilliant October afternoon in the front field by the Moutoux Barn, we quickly came up with a plan. Almost three decades later, after shaping the Loudoun farm into its current state of production and beauty, Ellen retired just a few months ago.

That was one supremely productive bean patch conversation.

Like all farm jobs, it takes many years to become a very good bean picker. Once you become a very good picker, it is one of the best ways to spend a few hours on a sunny afternoon – if the beans are good, which is not always the case. The best beans grow in September and early October and that's also the best bean picking weather. Maybe we will find more solutions to the world's many problems this fall. We can always hope.