

Stocking up for Winter Sustainability & Growing Food in the Winter Both Indoors and Outside

As our food system and source of electricity become less stable and dependable, it is important to be prepared for the various storms of life by “stocking up” and being resourceful!

As I study our American History of the average person, it has only been since the end of World War Two that people have depended on Grocery stores to provide the food and goods to sustain our lives. Prior to that time, most people naturally stocked up for the winter and then budget their food and household items to get them through to the spring harvests. The local mercantile or country store would have only the basic necessities to supplement their own supplies.

With transportation and refrigeration improvements of the 1950’s supermarkets sprang up in urban and suburban areas providing packaged produce, baked goods and foods from around the country. Most recently we find grocery stores even in rural areas and blend department stores with food stores. Now we have foods and other things from all over the world, providing foods and products we once had only during our own growing seasons. These conveniences are now not as trustworthy or consistently available, so we are getting back to basics in some ways.

So often when there is a weather report of a snow storm of an inch or two, a “possible” storm of any kind, people run out to the store for “milk and bread”, or whatever else might be needed because they may be stuck in the house and the stores might run out of something they may need, or want.

I like to do my “shopping” at home when a weather event is forecasted, or we are stuck at home for a while by an ice storm or something. Stocking up is the way to accomplish this!

Fruits and vegetables have a limited availability of harvest “window” in the growing season. We are able to extend the season of a crop through “staggered planting” so there is an extended time of harvest, but still it will not last all year. If you have a vegetable garden, or frequent local farmer’s markets and farm stands, preserving your produce for later use includes drying, canning, freezing and root cellaring. There are many resources available to show you how. Enjoying the harvest **as it arrives** through the year will give you the best food value, flavor and texture and is the best reward for your labors. Preserving it at its peak of freshness, through the season lets us remember our success as well as

the satisfaction of knowing we are providing healthy food for our own table through the year.

- **Keeping a stock** of inexpensive and nourishing **dry goods** is important through the winter as well. You will notice that none of these foods and other items requires electrical refrigeration. ***Remember that our electricity is not always dependable when we have New England storms.***
- Consider buying
 - Some bottled water **or** fill some containers from your water source. Keep one gallon of **drinking water**, per person, per day on hand.
 - Also keep some water available in the bathroom for one or two **flushes** a day. Filling the bathtub with water will provide a ready source for flushing and other non-drinking water.
 - Save large **glass jars** with tight fitting lids to store your dry goods and prevent bugs from spoiling the food. Clear glass jars on your shelves will also look nicer than boxers and bags and you are able to see how much or little is in them.
 - ◆ Dry goods purchased in cardboard boxes, pantry bugs hide in the glue of the boxes and will hatch in your cabinets. Transferring to glass jars with tight fitting lids will prevent the bugs from being a pest.
 - ◆ Dry goods purchased in plastic bags will spoil more rapidly, if not transferred into glass jars with tight fitting lids.
 - **brown rice**
 - dried bean **varieties**
 - White beans, small red, black, black-eye, navy, etc.
 - Split peas, both green and yellow
 - Tip: Beans and rice combining to make a complex carbohydrate for a healthy protein giving the body more energy. To complete the meal, add a vegetable.
 - Whole grain Pasta varieties
 - Any that your family enjoy
 - Baking ingredients for making basic foods
 - Wheat Flour,
 - Corn meal
 - Sugar varieties
 - Baking powder
 - Baking soda
 - yeast
 - Shortening
 - Oils
 - Canned or dried milk

- Salt
- Spices
- **Pantry foods** could include:
 - Tomato sauce
 - Salsa
 - Canned vegetables
 - Canned bean varieties
 - Tuna fish
 - Peanut butter
 - Jellies and preserves
 - Cans or jars of fruits
 - Juices
 - Dried fruits, herbs and vegetables
 - Other foods your family enjoy
- **Winter produce storage:**
 - Apples
 - Winter Pears
 - Winter Squash
 - Spaghetti Squash
 - Acorn Squash
 - Onions
 - Garlic
 - Potato varieties
 - Cabbages
 - Carrots (in ground is the best winter storage. See above.)
 - ◆ **Tip:** This winter produce should be stored in a cool, dry place in open baskets of wire or wood, as they need to have air circulation to prevent spoilage. Check your produce every two weeks to rotate your stock and remove any spoilage that may spread. Some foods that are starting to go by could be used for a hearty soup.
 - For more information, see the CT NOFA hand-outs or website at **ctnofa.org**.
- **Tip:** It is best to start buying dry foods in bulk in the fall, or late summer when they are on sale, and store in glass containers with tight fitting metal lids. In this way, the food will stay fresher longer, and prevents bugs and moisture from harming it. The shelf life of the food is also extended. Another benefit of storing in glass containers is you can see through the glass to know what you have and how much you have of it.
- **Glass jars** can be saved from pasta sauce, fruit, pickles, jellies and jams and many other food sources. Just be sure to wash and dry them completely before reusing them.

Other items to keep a stock on hand include:

- paper products,
- laundry detergent,
- batteries,
- dishwashing liquid,
- Toothpaste,
- batteries of all sizes,
- candles *and matches*,
- extra blankets,
- a propane stove *with extra fuel*,
- Flashlights *with fresh batteries*
- Bandages and ointments

❖ **Tip:** Buy these things when they are on sale prices through the year, not at full or inflated prices at the last minute. Use coupons from the newspapers, magazines or the internet to further save on stocking up items. Planning through the year is less expensive and the cost is spread out though out the year instead of all at once.

A hearty soup made from things on hand has more food value than a canned soup and costs much less money! This is my “**Basic Soup Recipe**”:

To a large pot (3 to 6 quarts), with a cover,

Add more than enough water to cook your rice or pasta

- You can also use vegetable stock
- Stock from cooking bones like “soup bones”, etc.
- Add a dash of salt to the water.
- Bring the water to a boil
- Add the pasta or rice to the boiling water and stir
- Rice may take 20-30 minutes of boiling; pasta may take 7 to 11 minutes to cook, depending on the quantity cooking and the size of your pot.
- Test the progress by removing a piece of pasta or rice
- After the pasta or rice have **almost** cooked through, add any uncooked vegetables
- Stir and continue to boil, stirring occasionally
- Depending on the kind of vegetables used and the size of the pieces, it might take 3 to 10 minutes for them to cook for an average size soup pot of three quarts.
- Test the vegetable pieces by poking them with a fork.
- After the vegetables are **almost** cooked through, add cooked beans
- Add more water as needed
- Add spices and flavoring

- Add anything else you think would improve the soup. I like adding some tomato sauce at this point to improve the flavor and thicken the soup.
- **Tip:** There are no specific measurements, or ingredients to this “Basic Soup”. This is according to your own preferences, the number of people eating the soup and the amount of ingredients available to make the soup.
- I like to fill serving size refrigerator dishes to refrigerate, or freeze, for quick meals at another time. Zip Lock freezer bags work very well too!

Stocking up is just part of the process. As you can see from the rest of this document, growing our own food all through the year is the best way to take care of the needs of our families and ourselves for less money and a secure food system.

❖ **Planting** a garden for food production takes place *many times through the growing season*. In December and January, salad greens are grown inside the house in containers by any window. In *February*, many plants are started from seed to plant outside later. *March* is the time to start Pea varieties outside, then mid to late *April* **cold weather crops** of cabbage family (Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower), onions, chives, salad greens, spinach, kale, carrots, parsnips, radishes, potatoes, etc. April is also the time to harvest the asparagus from your planting two, or more years ago. Egyptian onion sprouts and chive greens are also ready for their first harvest in March and April. Too often we overlook the tender dandelion and violet greens in the spring that is very high in nutritional value and readily available. Planning for a full season of food is important.

❖ **Outdoor Winter Gardening:**

- ❖ **Cold weather crops** (may also grow in the shade in warm weather):
 - ◆ **Peas** – plant by seed outdoors, usually around mid March, if the soil is workable and not frozen, or muddy. Do the same in August, to early September. It is best to soak the seeds overnight before planting.
 - ◆ **Broccoli** – start indoors and plant outside early April and may be planted again in August. Allow the plant from April to rest through the hot summer and it will reward you with abundant food through the fall and winter to the following April!
 - ◆ **Brussels sprouts** can be put out by plants in April, with more plants set out in late August. The April plants will need to rest through the warm summer, then will continue to grow through the fall. The harvest is best after the hard frost and all through

the winter months! After the spring harvest, the plants will provide Broccoli type shoots that taste like broccoli; if left, they will bud with yellow flowers that are edible and beautiful in your salads.

- ◆ **Cabbage family** – plant in April
 - ◆ **Onion varieties** – plant in April around the perimeter of the garden.
 - ◆ **Lettuce family** -. Plant in April in the sun,
 - in summer In the shade,
 - August in the sun and
 - Fall, through winter in cold frames
 - December through the winter **in** the house!
 - ◆ **Kale** - Plant in April in the sun,
 - **Harvest the outer leaves** it will rest in the summer, then perk up in the fall and go through the winter! I have had Kale available outside for harvesting through the winter.
 - summer Kale in the shade,
 - August in the sun and
 - December in the house and outside.
 - ◆ **Spinach** - Plant in April in the sun,
 - summer in the shade,
 - August in the sun and
 - December in the house
 - ◆ **Garlic** – Plant cloves outside in October or when the temp is consistently cold. Mulch for the winter, harvest greens (scapes) in June, harvest garlic in July when the stalks die back.
 - ◆ **Parsnips** – Plant by seed in April, harvest the following February or March for a sweet fresh vegetable in the cold months. May also be planted in late August and harvested after the hard frost in November.
 - ◆ **Carrots** – plant by seed **weekly**, late April to Mid June, then Mid August through September. This will give you a consistently available harvest through November, but save some to harvest for February and March. Carrots store best underground and will give a sweeter production after the frost.
- ❖ Most people think of May and June to be the only time to plant. That is the time for planting the **warm weather crops** of tropical plants such as Tomatoes, Peppers, eggplant, squash family (Summer Squash, Zucchini, Winter squash, pumpkins, etc.), carrots, string beans and a host of other warm weather crops. May is also the time to start harvesting the peas and broccoli planted in March and April.

- ❖ In **June, harvest** Broccoli and Peas, until the weather becomes too hot. At that time, the peas die back for the season. Sometimes the broccoli will continue to struggle through the summer months to begin producing again through the fall and into the winter months. We also harvest Strawberries and Blueberries we may have planted last April, or years ago.
- ❖ In **July, harvest** Garlic from what was planted last October. For this reason, planting Garlic around the outside of a rose bed or the perimeter of a vegetable garden is best, so other crops may be planted within the garlic perimeter with the other plants being protected from predators. After harvesting the garlic in July, boost the soil with some composted cow manure.
- ❖ By **August**, the average gardener is ready to quit for the year. Don't do it! This is just *mid growing season*. Celebrate what you have harvested and look forward to **the rest of the season!**
 - In **August**, it is time to plant **cold weather crops** of cabbage family (Brussels Sprouts, Broccoli, Cabbage, cauliflower), Onions, chives, salad greens, spinach, kale, Pea varieties, Carrots, Endive, Kohlrabi, radishes, etc. **August is only mid growing season**, not a time to quit. As one crop is going by, a new one is planted in its place. Those plants we establish in August are harvested through the fall, and into November in many cases. Carrots can even over winter to be harvested in March and April, so plant enough for both fall and spring harvests.
- ❖ **October, to mid November**, is the time to plant Garlic for next year. Harvesting other crops continues, even after the frost. Root crops, like carrots and parsnips, continue to grow through the cool fall and sometimes into next spring. Potato varieties can also be harvested into November. The energy of most plants and shrubs goes into the roots for the winter. The winter months are when plants and shrubs work on their root system to prepare for spring growth, so foods like garlic, parsnips and carrots do well *through* the winter. **Hearty cold weather crops use sugar as an anti-freeze** for protection from the cold. This is why many foods taste sweeter **when picked after the frost, or hard freeze**. Plan some protection for the more tender warm weather plants. A light covering of plastic, or fabric at night will provide Tomatoes into October and even November, but remove it by 9:00 the next day to prevent burning.. Salad greens and Peas will also continue into October, and sometimes into November. Brussels sprouts, Carrots, Parsnips and other root crops will also be available into November, leaving some carrots and parsnips for a winter harvest, as well. The spring harvests of these are sweeter and very welcome as a fresh late winter vegetable.

There are many **wild vegetables** available in our yards and woodlands in the early spring and throughout the year. In late February or March into April there are tender leaves of violets, chives and dandelions that are delicious in salads, as well as cooked greens. The tubers of Jerusalem Artichokes may be boiled or

roasted like potatoes. There are many more, but these are often more available to the average person and easily recognizable.

There are so many more vegetables to choose from, but these are the most frequently requested. Each vegetable has its own needs for soil type, temperature requirements, water needs and soil type preferences to produce a good crop.

Plant your crops so that plants with similar needs are together. It will be much easier to care for them.

- As you can see, planting and harvesting take planning for the rhythm throughout the **growing season, from February to November and beyond!**

For more tender crops like lettuce and spinach, build a **cold frame, high tunnels** or **row covers** outside to house these crops through the winter. This will take more tending and materials, but some people enjoy the process for exercise in the winter months.

For a healthy garden, it is best to check your plants daily. By keeping up with your garden, you are able to find problems as they occur and deal with them before they become unmanageable and discouraging. A daily visit to your garden usually takes only a few minutes and can be a very relaxing time of the day. I try to carry a bucket and pruners to tidy up the garden as I go. I often bring a harvest basket to collect anything that is ready to be collected, or I just nibble as I go and harvest at another time.

Water for the garden is best applied in the morning hours, sometime between the hours of 6:00-10:00. The reason for watering in the morning, rather than in the evening, is that plants only drink in the day light, not at night. They sleep at night like we do, so the moisture would sit on the soil feeding mold and mildew spores, if watering was done in the evening. For this reason I keep a full watering can handy for morning use.

Harvesting your crops will be a daily task. The more often you harvest from the plants, the more they will produce. The more they produce the more nutrition the plants will require to keep up the pace. “Snacks” of a quarter inch of compost added to the surface of the soil every two or three weeks will make a big difference in the yield of the plants. If vegetables seem bitter, a solution of lime (the mineral, not citrus) and water can be used for watering in the morning. The food will be sweeter the next time you pick. PH makes a big difference.

❖ **Preserving your produce** for later use includes drying, canning, freezing and root cellaring. There are many resources available to show you how. Enjoying the harvest **as it arrives** through the year is the best reward for our labors. Preserving it at its peak of freshness, through the season lets

us remember our success as well as the satisfaction of knowing we are providing healthy food for our own table through the year.

❖ **Indoor Vegetable Gardening** can be done without special lighting!

➤ The cold weather crops of **salad greens, spinach and radishes** can be grown in **window boxes** inside your home. The cold temperatures against the window will not bother the plants. The light from the window and regular attention will provide healthy fresh food in the winter for much less money than would cost to buy “fresh” greens from the store. The nurturing activity also prevents the “winter blues” for most people. This is a wonderful activity for families, people who live alone, senior living centers, and schools.

➤ **A light weight window box** may be built using:

- An Eight foot gutter section cut into two four foot lengths.
- Poke holes in one of the sections to make drainage for the excess water to flow.
- Add end caps to both four foot sections of gutter.
- Place 1/2 inch of gravel or pebbles in the bottom section
- Place the other section (with the drainage holes) into the other section
- Fill the top section with potting soil
- Water the soil lightly and wait an hour for the water to settle, then water again.
- Plant the seeds with a light coating of soil, as directed on the package.
- Water with a mister twice a day for three days, then once a day in the mornings
- When the sprouts show 1 1/2 inches of growth, weed them, but put them in your salad, or nibble as you go.
- Turn the garden around once a week to have stronger and more balanced plants. The plants grow towards the sun, so turning them will help them to move and not be stick against the window.
- As the greens grow, harvest only the outer leaves to allow the inner growth to continue producing for months of food.

❖ Another way to grow food inside is to grow **sprouts** in a jar on your kitchen counter. The sprout jar could be purchased, or made by you:

- Just take a clean glass jar with a tight fitting lid,
- Poke multiple holes in the lid, using an awl or a nail, for air and to let excess water drain out.
- Rinse each morning for about a week to get a healthy crop of greens for your enjoyment.
- Having a few jars going at various stages and various types of sprouts too, will provide a constant source of these nutritious vegetables for your meals.

As you can see, it is possible to grow our own food all year round and have healthy food available to us in our own homes. We can grow our food inside the house or apartment all year round, as well as outside in the ground and in containers. All it takes is a little time each day and the motivation to eat well with less expense.

It is my hope that by growing our own food and preparing for the seasons we will have a more peaceful lifestyle and a more secure food supply.

All of these “tools”, and more, for extending the season can also be purchased as kits:

- A.M.Leonard 800-543-8955 or amlgardener.com
- Growers Supply 800-476-9715 or GrowersSupply.com

For further reading **about vegetables:**

Step by Step Organic Vegetable Gardening”
By Shepherd Ogden
Harper Collins

“The Gardener’s A-Z Guide to Growing Organic Food”
Tanya L.K.Denckia
Story Publishing

For further reading **about “Stocking up:”**

“Stocking Up”
Rodale Press

“Root Cellaring”
By Mike and Nancy Bubel
Rodale Press