



The garden is calling. All the preparation that went into tilling the soil, planting the seeds and seedlings, and the work put into their maintenance, is finally coming to fruition. The anticipation of those first veggies is finally here. The work for the duration of the garden has begun. Time to start hunting down those canning jars, not the collectible ones, but the work horses of the canning season, such as the modern machine-made Ball and Kerr jars. The canners are coming out of their long winter storage to be tested and put back into the forefront of the storage closets. Canning supplies, canning rings and lids, are searched for in the stores and online. Depending on the size of the garden, a hopeful approximation is purchased so there is no last minute scramble for them. Vinegar, sugar, pectin and various spices are purchased in bulk, preparing for what is hopefully a bountiful harvest. Previous generations did not have the luxuries that we enjoy when harvest season approached. We have our electric or gas stoves, air conditioning, pressure canners, and kitchen gadgets to expedite the preparation of our garden goodies. What is more, we have the options of Farmer's Markets, grocery stores, or the neighbor who overestimated the amount of veggies the garden would provide. Our family size is also smaller in this generation, even compared to our parents generation, so the amount of food we need to preserve is less and even the jar sizes are smaller.

Prior generations had to be more prepared for the changing of the seasons than we do now. If the food wasn't grown and stored, there was no rush to the corner grocery store to purchase it. Even in my generation, which wasn't that long ago, in my mind anyway, extra land was cleared every year to expand the gardens. Being on mountainous terrain was a challenge, but even on the rockiest of soils, corn was planted, if nothing else. My Dad is 88 and Mom is 81 and there were only five of us kids. Dad was one of 8 children, Mom was one of eleven children, that was a lot of mouths to feed, especially during the Great Depression and the WWII era.

Canning jars were manufactured and prepared differently back then, nothing like the effortlessness we enjoy now. Crocks for

fermentation were a necessity, as were spring boxes or root cellars. Wax sealers were common to use for jellies or jams and were just as the name implies. Wax was used to cover the top of the jar to keep air out and a tin cap and wire were used to secure them. Jars with glass inserts and bail closures were used with jar rubbers to provide a seal. Zinc lids became an easier and better way to preserve, but even those required special care. The lids had to have a gasket, and once the zinc lid was torqued into place, it became flattened on the bottom. If one was lucky enough to have one, a special tool was used to flatten the metal back out. Even with these supplies, it was necessary to have a cold cellar for the root vegetables, hence the nickname of the "root cellar", potatoes, cabbage, squash, cushaw and pumpkins were often kept whole and had to remain unblemished, or they would spoil if not stored in the root cellar.

People harvested their garden in the early morning or the night before for a marathon canning day. Fires were built outside and large tubs filled with water. Water had to be carried from a well (if one was fortunate enough to have this luxury) a spring, or the creek. Jars were washed and preparations were made. The children or other family members gathered together to being to prepare the veggies for preservation. Cabbage was brought in and washed, the adults cubed the heads up and the kids got the fun of chopping the cabbage for kraut, mixed pickles, or chow chow, whatever was on the canning agenda that particular day. Dad to take an empty cream can and heat it up so he could pry the lid off. We used this as a vegetable chopper. If the chopper got dull, it would bruise the cabbage (a huge no no), so Dad would use a file to keep it sharp. Once the cabbage would reach mom's satisfaction, they would cram it into half gallon jars, making sure there were absolutely no air pockets in it. By this point in the canning process, the brine was already boiling on the stove, so Mom would add the salt and vinegar to each jar and fill with boiling water. Subsequently she would let it settle til she had all the jars full, then the lids were placed and into the cold dark cellar they went until the fermentation was complete. Two to three weeks later we would have that yummy kraut for supper.

As each veggie matured, it was harvested and either eaten fresh or preserved. Their green bean patch was planted at different intervals and depending on the variety and intended use. White half runners were for canning, greasy beans for cooking with new potatoes and short cuts for drying. Dad would pick the beans the night before and Mom would lay a quilt down on the living room floor, and Dad would bring the pillow cases full of beans and lay them out so they didn't sweat. The next morning, after breakfast, each kid would gather around the quilt and start stringing and breaking beans until they were gone. Mom would be busy filling the canning jars with beans and Dad would be outside prepping the tub with water and building a fire under it. The tub could hold twenty-five quarts at a time and had to boil for three hours. Canning beans was an all day affair. When it came time to dry the beans for leather britches, Dad had made us large sharp needles from an old sawblade with a big enough eye so the twine used would fit through. We used heavy bailing twine instead of sewing thread. He had nails drove into the rafters of the building to hang the strings of beans from and would keep a fire built in his pot bellied stove til the beans were completely dry.

Corn was harvested, again by the sack fulls, brought in and



shucked and cleaned. Some went into jars, some in the freezer, but my favorite was the pickled corn. Dad would prepare one of the huge crocks in the basement, add the corn on the cob, place a towel over it and add a plate with a rock on top to hold the corn down in the brine. As a kid, I would sneak into the basement and grab ears straight out of the brine to eat. Mom always wondered what happened to all the pickled corn. Dad would plant a special corn for his gristmill. The corn was tall and made huge ears. He left the corn on the stalks until it started to dry out. He would then pull the ears and let them dry over one of the furnace vents, once it was dry the fun part began, getting those hardened kernels off the cob. Oh the memories of those blisters on my thumbs! Dad taught us to take an empty cob to rub against the other to get the corn off.



Dinner - YUM!

They always planted a huge potato patch. The potatoes, when they matured, were dug and taken to the Tater Hole. Dad had built a special basement under the building with cinder blocks and a cement roof just for that purpose. It had a metal ladder to one side to get in and out of it, and he had tables and bins built out of rough lumber. It was a creepy, dark, damp room as a child, and I had to be on the lookout for the spiders that loved the dark. The room still exists today, but once we kids grew up and left home, they didn't require the exhorbant amount of preserved foods anymore. Today, Dad simply built his smaller dairy above ground due to lack of demand.

My Granny and Aunt Rene did all their canning on a wood cookstove which heated the house up in the summers. When Dad and Mom first married, a wood cookstove is what they used for heating the house, cooking and canning. There was no running water in the house and Mom carried water from the well at Ma and Pa's well up the hill from their house. They had electricity, but in the late 50s, indoor plumbing and water into the house was a luxury that many couldn't afford on a coal miner's pay. Dad and his brother, my Uncle Algie, would go in together and buy hogs in the spring and use the summer to fatten them up. All the garden scraps went to the pigs, cows and chickens we raised that fed us year round. Dad and Algie would slaughter the hogs when the weather turned cold enough. The cows were used for their milk and eventually their meat. Mom would make butter with the milk and at times make buttermilk to use in the cornbread, a part of which was Dad's home ground meal. Chicks were ordered and when they arrived, they got to stay in the house for a little while. We kids loved this and would claim our bitty and name it. Some were kept as laying hens, others

were headed to the freezer when they got old enough. This too was a family work day. Dad would have the water scalding hot and we would dress the chickens and butcher them to Mom's specifications. Nothing was wasted, the livers and gizzards were parted out for future meals and placed in the freezer.

The world as they knew it, has changed, the simple things they considered luxuries, ie indoor plumbing, running water, televisions and washing machines, are now a necessity. My generation too has transformed. I remember when Dad installed the bathroom in the house, getting our first television, having a telephone installed, and Mom started driving a car. Each of these extravagances is miniscule considering the technological advances that are taking place today. As I have gotten

older, many of what were considered luxuries are now considered commonplace in everyday life. My son was born into what is now the age of technology. With televisions in almost every room and TV shows on demand, gone are the days of anticipating Saturday morning cartoons and a family evening where we would all sit down together to watch a family show with a bowl of popcorn on a black and white TV. Kids today enjoy instant access through the internet as they are constantly glued to their smart phones. Its sad to think how we as kids, even though we didn't have a lot of the luxuries, were satisfied with what we had. We played in the creek and in the mountains, we worked in the gardens, helped preserve the fruits of that labor and took care of the animals that would provide us sustenance throughout the year. The canners and gardeners of this generation are almost non-existant, thus making most individuals less and less prepared for catastrophic future food shortages. Without the large farms and food processing plants there will be no groceries or meats in the stores to purchase, and sadly a lot of children and young adults would not know how to survive without them.

Hopefully, with the pandemic that has swept the nation, once it and the racial divide that is happening across this country, people will actually begin to go back to their roots and learn the skills needed to be a self-sustaining generation. And lastly, as a mother, I hope that I have instilled the work ethic and the skills for my son to survive if there should ever come a time of signifigant food shortages. I have taught him how to hunt, fish, garden and even more importantly, how to can food

Until next time, lets keep Preserving The Past!!!!

