

Shop the Backyard

June 2009

I've been hanging around growers lately. No, I'm not talking about my grandsons. Now close to three and four years of age, they're growing like weeds, but they're not tall enough yet to reach high places. For their latest escapade, the boys stood on kiddy chairs to take the hinges off the front door with their screwdrivers and drills.

The growers I've been around have been growers of food—tomatoes, radishes, lettuce, spinach, eggplant, carrots, and onions, even wheat. After putting in my garden before taking the train to my hometown, Dexter, Michigan, I arrived at my friend's house in time to help with her garden. We spent a joyous day digging, raking, planting, watering, and building up the compost pile. It's so simple, yet satisfying--this love we have for creating sumptuous meals out of food grown by our own labors. A friend of ours is trying Red Fife wheat this year in a few patches on his city lot. He plans to grind the wheat and make his own bread in his newly crafted wood fired oven. First grown in Ontario in the 1840's, Red Fife has survived to this day because of the work of a handful of organic heritage wheat farmers across Canada who've faithfully grown the wheat to keep it from extinction.

At Zingerman's BAKE, a teaching kitchen with hands-on baking classes in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I was able to observe a "Bake Me a Cake" class. I was curious why the series of baking classes, which covered everything from bread making to pies and fruit tarts, filled so rapidly. What draws 12 students to pay \$125 for four hours of instruction? Can it be the butter cake, angel food cake, and flourless chocolate truffle cake they each bake and take home? While a mix of French classics played in the background and the tantalizing aroma of the first chocolate cakes wafted from the ovens, this smiling group rolled up their sleeves, dug in with their wooden spoons and got their hands sticky. It seems this culinary-minded generation's idea of fun is learning how to make something delicious with their hands and having an immediate final product to show for their efforts.

A commitment to baking, growing and preserving fresh sustainable food abounds. From the New York Times, I learn that Brooklynites, most in their 20's and 30's, with an appreciation for traditional methods and flavors, are hand making pickles, cheeses and chocolates the way others form bands and artists' collectives. A program called "The Greening of Detroit" in which community gardens are grown in vacant lots produced 160,000 tons of food last year from 500 participating gardens. Bookstores are filled with titles on growing and preserving food along with those of Michael Pollan whose motto is "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." Sharon Astyk's books, *Depletion and Abundance* and *A Nation of Farmers*, address coming to terms with peak oil, climate change and hard times. Their underlying message is be prepared, develop strong communities, and find a better way to feed our families healthy food. Be prepared—it's a motto I've held onto from my Girl Scout days and a motto of Red Cross with whom I volunteer. It's a motto all of us on the coast should live with.

One thing we can do is grow a garden. If we can't shop our own backyard, we have other choices. We can buy seasonal food at local farmers markets along the coast from Astoria to Tillamook. We can support Kingfisher Farms and Revolution Gardens, both of which run CSA (community supported agriculture) programs in which we can subscribe to farm produce delivered to our doors. With Revolution we can add to the order organic meats, breads, pies and flowers from local growers. We

can volunteer in the community garden of Alder Creek Farm and take home a share of the harvest.

I bought pint size rakes and shovels for my grandsons who'll soon pay me a visit. I'll put them to work in the garden digging, raking and planting. What better way to invest in the future and to start to save the world than with the little hands of the next generation.