

Vegetable Favorites

By Jeff Poulterer

Some organizations call anything grown in the United States local food. The local food movement calls food grown or raised within 100 miles of home local food. Regardless of your exact definition, the best and most flavorful food can be grown right in your garden.

I grow some things that must be planted every year but the easiest things come back naturally. Asparagus is delicious in April and May. The quickest way to get it is buy roots at your local feed and seed store. Plant them a couple of feet apart in the richest soil you have. Once the roots have been planted the first year there is not much work to it. I let the stalks grow into large fern like plants. The roots are establishing underground and getting stronger. Nothing is harvested the first year. The second season will produce the first crop. This crop will not be a big one, but by the third season (two years) you will get a lot of asparagus. During the spring I harvest the stalks every day or every other day. They grow fast, especially when the weather is warm and there has been recent rain. My two beds are over ten years old now and produce more than ever. They say asparagus will grow in the same place for over twenty years. Maintenance is not difficult. I burn the weeds off in March before the shoots come up and fertilize with goat manure and pine needles on top of the ground every few years. Also I add woodstove ash to give them minerals and sweeten the soil. You can eat the stalks raw or cook them for a few minutes in a steamer or put them in a casserole. My two 5 x 10 foot beds produce all my wife and I can eat and more. We blanch it and freeze it so we can have it all year whenever we desire.

Another neat vegetable is butternut squash. The cool thing is that this squash doesn't need to be frozen or canned to store all winter. Just put it in a cool place and leave it until you need it. It is delicious just baked and eaten with salt and pepper. As an annual, however, it must be seeded each year. It also requires a lot of space for the vines to run. Another cool thing about butternut squash is that it is resistant to the horrendous squash vine-borer.

Whether you choose to grow annuals, perennials, or both you will enjoy the taste of your own fresh vegetables and save a considerable amount of money too.