

# HOMESTEADING

BY E.L. WYVES



## WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

*How one of the East End's most self-sufficient couples stretches the harvest.*

SAG HARBOR—As Labor Day becomes memory, if you haven't yet planted your vegetable garden, then it's sort of like you got to the party too late. Come to grips with the fact that you will not pull any potato plants dangling with meaty tubers from your own ground and that the only Jack O'Lanterns you will pick will be at several dollars a pound. As your neighbors watch their tomatoes turn from green to ripe, it's best to be polite and congratulate them, and hope you are better prepared next year.

Of course, the waning days of summer are the right time to begin your winter garden, and the horticultural gods have blessed humanity with hardy crops, like turnips, that sprout and mature quickly for immediate gratification. Those without a green thumb can take heart in the fact that East End farmstands are groaning under the weight of tomatoes, string beans, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts—all prime for the sauté pan, pickling jar or freezer. But, if you depended on your own harvest for sustenance, you'd really be out of luck.

That's why Dale Haubrich and Bette Lacina, perhaps the most self-sufficient couple on the East End, have been planning for the shorter days like the industrious grasshopper in Aesop's fable. This organic farming couple, who tend an acre in Sag Harbor and another acre at EECO Farm in East Hampton, raise much of their own food and store what they can't immediately use. When they leave Sag Harbor for winters in Arizona, they drive in a van loaded down with home-grown fare, and plant their Arizona greenhouse with cutting greens the day they arrive.

There is a certain nutritional logic to eating what's in season in your area: tomatoes and watermelon in the heat of summer, cutting greens in the cooler months. "If you eat the foods that live in your environ-

ment, they're going to be healthier for you," said Ms. Lacina, as she stirred two boiling pots of tomatoes, the first step of a two-person assembly line to make 80 quarts of tomato juice. The room smelled like rich tomato soup. Mr. Haubrich cranked stewed tomatoes through a grinder that deposited tomato juice in one bowl and skins and seeds in another (destined for the compost pile), and added: "We are staying in the seasons." To which, Ms. Lacina replied, "But you're not really eating in season when you're canning." To which, Mr. Haubrich responded by saying that he was going to the basement for more mason jars.

The couple is driven as much by taste and thrift and health concerns, as by ecological considerations. Ms. Lacina said that store-bought produce simply doesn't taste as well as her own. "I'm totally spoiled," she said. Some gardeners even argue that you haven't really lived until you've dusted snow off a curled emerald leaf of Toscano kale and clipped it for a winter soup.

"We don't let anything go to waste," said Mr. Haubrich. With oil prices at record highs and general anxiety about the vulnerability of a long-distance food system, it doesn't hurt to stock up. "Just in case," Mr. Haubrich said with a smile.

Provisioning for the winter actually requires year-round planning to grow a range of crops that ripen throughout the year and together form a complete diet. Since Mr. Haubrich and Ms. Lacina raise organic produce for restaurants and a farmers market, they already grow a cornucopia of crops. And, starting at the end of August and continuing through October or November, Mr. Haubrich and Ms. Lacina trade in their work planting, weeding, and harvesting in the field for a parallel set of jobs cleaning, trimming, chopping, slicing,



## DALE'S TIPS FOR EXTENDING THE HARVEST

Our South Fork autumns may be long, but as the days begin to shrink, so does the palette of crops available to the gardener.

"In September, there are a lot of things you can still plant," said Mr. Haubrich. "Greens are the best. The same things you plant in spring. Oriental greens like tatsoi and mizuna. Mustard greens. Collard greens. Kale. Spinach, arugula, and mesclun blends. There's still time to seed things like turnips, radishes, carrots, and beets. You'll get baby-sized crops. With rutabegas you might get big ones." (A couple of years ago, on Mr. Haubrich's advice, I planted White Globe turnips in my Sag Harbor garden the first week of October and had a perfect row of tennis ball-sized orbs for Thanksgiving.)

In September, if your garden has blank spaces left by recent potato or bean harvests, consider broadcasting radish, turnips, carrots, or peas.

When planting crops you plan to keep in the garden all winter, plant the seeds deeper than usual, and mound up hay or soil around the base of the plants before the ground freezes.

Herbs like parsley, celery greens, and tarragon will stay green much of the winter, as will leeks, salsify, and parsnips, and greens like kale. It's too late to start them from seeds, but you might still find herb seedlings at greenhouses and farms.

Brussels sprouts, carrots and parsnips sweeten with a light frost, so be patient.

Onions, garlic, and winter squashes need to be cured in a cool, dry location before they can be stored for long periods.

Many hands make light work. Throw a pickling or canning party to turn the tedious steps of food preservation into a social affair.

Shallots and scallions can be transplanted until a few weeks before the ground freezes.

Garlic cloves should go in the ground in October for a harvest the following summer.

Remember: doing anything is better than nothing, and it's easier than you think.

Mr. Haubrich and Ms. Lacina store 80 quarts of "tomato juice," an all-purpose mixture they use to flavor sauces and stews, season meatloaf, make bloody Mary's, or simply enjoy as a late-winter pick-me-up. They also can 20 quarts of pears and peaches, and freeze 25 quarts of corn and 10 quarts of peas. **Opposite, from left to right:** Stewing down tomatoes. Removing the skins and seed. Ms. Lacina, in her "canning costume," sterilizing the filled jars. "When I'm really canning," she said, "dirty old t-shirts are more practical." **Above:** Dehydrated tomatoes.

steaming, mixing, mashing, measuring, boiling, cooling, bagging, jarring, and sealing. "We eat more fresh stuff in the summer," she said. "Besides, who wants to be in the hot kitchen in the summer? It's not like we're doing it for entertainment."

Stocking the pantry may seem novel today, but it's nothing new. "Of course, we had a large garden and orchard," said Bridgehampton farmer and historian Richard Hendrickson of growing up in the early 1900s. "When anything was too plentiful, it was immediately canned in glass jars. And that was your winter food. It was a way of life growing up before you went to the grocery store three or four days a week." In addition to canned peas and peaches, Mr. Hendrickson's family stored beets, turnips, potatoes and Brussels sprouts in the root cellar, pumpkins and winter squash in the barn, eggs in water glass, stored cabbage upside-down in a trench in the soil mounded with hay. (Mr. Haubrich, who grew up on a farm in Iowa, remembers storing whole watermelons the same way.)

But, talk to most East End farming families and they'll tell you that canning, pickling, and provisioning on the large scale fell by the wayside decades ago. Which is perhaps why Ms. Lacina, who grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, first learned how to can from Mr. Haubrich, who grew up on an Iowa farm, where the family ran around from dawn until dusk harvesting and storing at the end of the season. "When you're growing all this stuff," said Ms. Lacina, "you've got to figure out what to do with it." For guidance, she looks to *Keeping the Harvest: Discover the Homegrown Goodness of Putting Up Your Own Fruits, Vegetables & Herbs*; *Pickles and Relishes: From Apples to Zucchini's*; *150 Recipes for Preserving the Harvest*; and *Keeping Food Fresh: Old World Techniques and Recipes* compiled by the editors at Terre Vivante, a French ecological center.

Because of a few bad experiences with freezer breakdowns during blackouts, Ms. Lacina tries to avoid freezing large quantities of food or other energy-hungry storage. She uses an old well on their property as a root cellar. She dehydrates tomatoes, pears, peaches, and corn. (She recently discovered that putting parsley or mushrooms in the refrigerator in a paper bag is an effective way to dry the crop.) She even makes her own fruit roll-ups out of berries.

Right now, Ms. Lacina is favoring wild fermentation—an ancient technique that uses water, salt, and airborne bacteria to make yogurt, sauerkraut and preserve just about any food. "So many storage recipes depend on a lot of sugar, a lot of salt, a lot of vinegar, which isn't that good for you," she explained. "With fermentation, it's a living food with healthful organisms. See *Wild Fermentation: The Flavor, Nutrition, and Craft of Live-Culture Foods*.

For Mr. Haubrich and Ms. Lacina, relying on their own food goes well beyond what's in their pantry. "I've learned to be more conscientious before I run out to the store and buy something," said Ms. Lacina. "I recently got the urge for cherries, but then I realized I had a freezer full of strawberries and raspberries."

In fact, the learning doesn't seem to end for this survivalist couple. In late July, after moving the irrigation around on their two farm plots and boxing zucchini, peppers, and onions for their customers, the two attended a seed-saving workshop in Amagansett. And preserving seed from one year's crop for planting the next year is the ultimate form of extending the harvest. □