

The Garden Changes Unpredictably

Written by Jeff Poppen
Tuesday, August 7, 2012

The garden changes unpredictably. I wanted to mow seven rows of drought-stricken cucumbers and beans, but save the nearby straightneck squash. By the time we got onions and potatoes up and I had the bushhog ready, the cucumbers and beans had arrived and the squash got mowed.

With the Purcell garden putting out squash at the rate of 20 or more bushels a week, we didn't need this older planting. Old lettuce beds have new plantings of beans and cucumbers for fall. Beets are in the cave and squash is in their old spot. A potato field is in kale, along with buckwheat, after a thorough subsoiling and composting.

Fall plantings of greens are started in late July. Lettuce, Chinese Cabbage, Bok Choy, and broccoli go in rows, to be later transplanted a foot apart in beds. Turnips get planted in mid-August, probably in the corn field.

As soon as a crop is done, the garden gets a cover crop of buckwheat, or another vegetable. There is no sense in letting it grow up in weeds. By mid-August through September, we'll be planting crimson clover for a winter cover crop. We use a nurse crop of buckwheat and daikon to help the clover get established.

A beautiful field now is the June planting of pepper, eggplant and sweet potato. Weed-free, soft soil greets your feet as you admire bright red peppers or dark purple eggplants. The sea of vines guarantees several tons of sweet potatoes in a few months.

Small flower patches grace the edges of the garden. Zinnias, cosmos and sunflowers bring color to the green carpet, waving joyfully above it all. Fragrant herbs, like sweet basil and sill, delight our noses.

An early melon or three were quite lovely, and have us looking for more. The whole melon field

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has received and is blooming again. Maybe the drought didn't kill them, but just delayed the main harvest.

Celery, chard and parsley patiently await cooler weather. They are alive and edible, but will really thrive in fall. Nearby, the climbing beans have wrapped around their bamboo poles and are reaching gracefully but in vain for the sky.

Tomatoes and cucumbers are anxious to be put up in jars. It all comes together, the exploding burst of summer's abundance. Whatever is going on, it will be different tomorrow.