

**Bring spring indoors by picking up potted tulips or hyacinths at your local greenhouse or grocery store.** I know I have written on this before, but I could not help myself in encouraging those of you who still have not taken the opportunity to bless your families with fresh produce and the fun of working together in your own garden. Since there is nothing like pulling tomatoes and pinching greens for a salad, whether you have five acres, one acre, a backyard, or just pots on the patio, consider planting your own vegetables. Personally, we do not have much space at our present home, but in just five raised beds along the side of our house (four 8 by 3 and one 12 by 3), we grow most of all the lettuce, chard, onions, tomatoes, peppers, okra, eggplants, broccoli, squash, green beans, basil, rosemary, thyme, oregano, parsley, dill, chives, lavender, mint, nasturtiums, pansies and sunflowers we need for our summer meals.

Our goal is to produce as much fresh, organic heirloom produce as we can for our family. To this end, we have purchased our seeds and seedlings through two companies: Seeds of Change and Seed Savers. Both of these companies are committed to preserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable organic agriculture through producing organic, traditional and heirloom seeds that are free from genetically modified organisms. Seeds of Change has been in business for 20 years and offers over 700 varieties of these excellent seeds. Seed Savers with 30 years of experience maintains 25,000 endangered varieties and offers 647 of these to its customers. For two years now, Sonia and I have ordered a variety of tomato and pepper seedlings from Seeds of Change and Seed Savers. Each plant has arrived in perfect condition and acclimated well to our garden's existing environment.

Varieties of seeds that we have enjoyed include Mesclun Salad Mix, Mesclun Spicy Mix, Early Palla Rossa Radicchio, Sucrine, Yugoslavian Red, Red Corral, Rossimo, Rubin, Black-Seeded Simpson, Rouge D'Hiver, Sorrel, Redina, Buttercrunch, Four Seasons, Bronze Arrow, Emerald Oak, Merlot, Red Deer Tongue, Sweet Valentine, and Red Oak Leaf lettuce; Rhubarb chard; Hidalgo hot peppers; Mammoth Spineless okra; Rosa Bianca eggplant; Calabrese, De Cicco, Waltham, and Early Green broccoli; Golden Scallopini bush squash; Blue Lake, Haricot Vert Maxibel, Royal Burgundy, Cascade Giant, Provider Snap Bush, Ideal Market, and Black Valentine beans; Cinnamon, Lemon, Lime, and Opal Purple Variegated basil; and Endurance, Giant Greystripe, and Mammoth sunflowers. So treat yourself to these lovely catalogs by contacting Seeds of Change at 888-762-7333, [www.seedsofchange.com](http://www.seedsofchange.com/) and Seed Savers at 563-382-5990, [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org/)

To help us sow our seeds at the proper depth, we calibrate tongue depressors at an eighth, quarter, half, and three quarters of an inch. For larger seeds, we actually just lay the seeds on top of the soil and then push them in the soil with the tongue depressor to the appropriate depth marked on the stick.

We plant so many different

varieties of vegetables that we often mark the depth and spacing information on the front of each seed packet to help us quickly identify how to sow them.

As Sonia, Josiah, and I were working our own compost into our garden beds, I was reflecting upon my appreciation of the fact that I knew the content of the composition of what I was putting into our garden, which will eventually end up in the food we eat. I also appreciated the fact that we were not wasting our vegetable and fruit peelings but were putting them to good use. Compost adds rich nutrients and essential trace elements back into the soil while increasing the population of beneficial creatures like earthworms, thus creating a balanced ecosystem that reduces problems with diseases and pests. So when a variety of organic materials are allowed to naturally decompose, the finished product is a miraculous substance that immensely improves the well being of the soil and the health of the plants that make it their home.

Almost every night of the week we enjoy a salad covered with a variety of our homemade dressings. Boston and Bibb lettuce are our favorites because of their supple, sweet, tender leaves. Both are butter lettuces deriving their name from their tender leaves, which truly are as soft as butter. We grow many varieties of lettuces, but none as elegant as these, making them the most lovely of all the members of the greens family.

Last year I had the most beautiful arbor full of lovely lush purple, rose, and lavender morning glories and purple and pink hyacinth bean blossoms. This was such a marvelous combination of color and texture that I intend to duplicate it again this year, only on a sturdier arbor. For even though these covered a metal arbor, the vines were so lush and heavy that during a windstorm the arbor broke in half. I have seen a lot of vine-covered arbors in my days, but none so lovely as this combination, except perhaps those covered in old roses. Yes, I love arbors and arches covered in roses, but my combination was so easy to cultivate and maintain that you cannot beat it.

Not only does mulch aesthetically enhance your landscape by defining your beds and borders, but also it benefits the well being of every bed as well because it helps prevent erosion, reduces moisture loss, improves drought resistance, provides a protective covering around sensitive root systems, helps control weeds, insulates the soil to maintain an even soil temperature, and improves soil structure by enriching the soil with valuable nutrients, thus leading to a balanced ecosystem that all culminates in the improvement of the health of your plants. Although some mulch is treated and dyed, we use mostly native regrad mulch, which contains all the parts of many woody plants. This diversity of materials makes it a very desirable mulch. Sometimes we also use hardwood mulch, but it, too, contains only native Missouri hardwoods. For maximum effectiveness, always lay mulch to a 3- to 4-inch depth.

Dyed red mulch? I hate the stuff! First of all, it is dyed and red of all colors! And we all know that red dye is bad so not only is it bad for the environment but also for the person who makes the application. Besides, it stands out like a sore thumb so that rather than enhancing the landscape, it detracts from the overall design. So although mulch is used to define beds and borders, it should blend naturally with the existing landscape.

To encourage strong, deep, healthy roots, you want to water your lawn deeply to a depth of 6-8 inches. And you only want to water at most two times a week. Mornings are best

because the afternoon sun increases the rate of evaporation, while water left on the lawn overnight can create problems with diseases. The exception is after seeding. Then you want to water every day for two weeks.

Antique metal planters are lovely additions to front porches. Since our porch receives very little light, I plant double bloom rose colored impatiens because they resemble miniature rose blossoms. To prepare your planter, line with coconut liner, fill with potting soil, and fill with plants suitable to pots. As with all potted plants, remember to feed them weekly with a diluted water-soluble fertilizer.

Did you know that a chili is really a fruit and not a vegetable? Packed with more vitamin C than an orange, one green chili pod gives more punch than just heat. Fulfilling the daily requirement for Vitamin A, one teaspoon of dried red chili powder is also touted to alleviate arthritis pain. I have never really appreciated foods that make my eyes water, but in moderation, chilies are a vital ingredient in the perfect salsa. We love Jedidiah's wonderful salsa so much that Sonia and I freeze green and red Hidalgo chilies whole and then place them in Ziploc bags to be used all year. If you cannot grow them yourselves, order them from the following website [www.hatch-chile.com](http://www.hatch-chile.com/).

I love boxwoods, my favorites being Wintergreen and Winter Gem. Neatly trimmed in May and later in the summer, these beauties form the basis of a sophisticated garden.

Aaahh, the honeysuckle is in full bloom with its sweet scent wafting through the air, making our evenings on the front porch truly a delight. Honeysuckle covers two stories of the corner of our house and wraps itself around the side and front of our porch, creating a lovely, vine covered cottage effect that smells glorious! Do yourself a big favor and plant honeysuckle around your sitting porch or near the entrances to your home. You will be forever grateful to God for creating this marvelous vine.