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NEW: In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



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Beware of Gardeners Bearing Gifts!

My lettuces have bolted but I don't care! It's time to plant a second crop of them for fall picking in any case. My attention is instead taken up with the basil and Swiss chard. Lovely huge harvests of the herb are turned into delicious pesto. Jars of the good, green stuff are whisked into the freezer where they wait to perk up winter meals when one is weary of root vegetables and stews.

The chards meanwhile are adding heft to the menu just in time to offset the monotony of yet another mixed green salad. These same salads were such a delight through spring but there's just so much of anything one can consume on a daily basis. Swiss chard simply keeps going through till winter. And versatile too. I sauté the leaves in olive oil with garlic and onions and add to pasta or rice, make soups, use wherever spinach is called. The more leaves I pick the more it puts out. A perfect plant. All it asks in return is regular watering and a cool corner of the garden.

Squash from the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) co-op is sitting pretty ready to be turned into breads. Some loaves get frozen to cheer up those cold winter mornings when getting out of bed is just no fun at all. And some get distributed to friends in the city where the fact that I bake is a thing of amazement and awe. Does this baker's ego a world of good. For special friends and an even bigger ego boost, I might on occasion toss in a jar of that pesto. I've developed an air of nonchalance to go with the giving as though such things are merely incidental in my otherwise busy life.

While on the subject of impressing city dwellers and other non-gardeners, see how a simple handful of mint and other culinary herbs tied to make a pretty bouquet puts a look of gratitude on their faces. No need to mention that they are the excess from a patch quite overrun with the darn things and you're

merely getting rid of the clippings. Go on, try it. You just might be rewarded with tickets to the hottest event in town.

I'm now eagerly anticipating the ripening tomatoes and Concord grapes. There's nothing like the flavor of a sun nurtured tomato just off the vine. I'm anticipating even more eagerly the returns for dropping off some of those tomatoes either fresh or, dried and luxuriating in herb infused olive oil along with a jar of jewel-toned grape jelly at a friend's who has very recently acquired an apartment with the perfect view of the Thanksgiving parade.

The fact that preparing the garden's summer offerings is so easy makes it all the more joyful. There's that much more time to partake of choice libations and read something completely trashy whilst nestled in a hammock. No other season encourages that quite so readily. But no reason to tell anybody that.

Does this make my character somewhat questionable? Having ulterior motives disguised in gestures of generosity are surely not to be encouraged? But then, I ask you – who is to say those friends have not obtained tickets, well located apartments and such just so they can partake of the bounty from my garden? It's possible.