



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

Craig Rullman
Columnist

A loon for legumes

This year I intend to garden — or farm, as I prefer to think of it — as if our lives depend on it.

I've set a high bar for this summer's haul: 500 pounds. I want to harvest 500 pounds of vegetables, eat them, preserve them, and give some of those pounds of food away to kith and kin.

After several years of less than satisfactory results, I've come to believe that if we approach this growing season with anything less than irrational passion, with anything short of religious fervor, we will once again fall well below potential.

No more. Sitting here

under the snowbanks — where we've all been collectively pressed together since November — and with plenty of time to think about it, I've decided to turn pro, to cast my amateur status, to become a kind of sunblasted gardening zealot, and get after the Super Bowl of harvests.

That's vanity, of course. Central Oregon, and my own spectacular acts of stupidity, have proven to be more than formidable adversaries. But waves of bugle-blowing golden mantles, Special Forces-tabbed rabbits, sudden freezes in late June, onion maggots, bad soil, and the occasional and unconscionable streak of laziness, have strafed my delusions of grandeur long enough.

The obvious question is: why am I doing this to myself? It's not as if, looking forward to spring, we don't have enough to do already. There is the colt I need to start. The mare who needs to be ridden every day. There is plenty of fencing that needs steady attention. We probably need to paint the house and re-stain the barn. There is always the writing, and reading, shooting enough to stay proficient, and I'd

love to get out kayaking and fishing and running in the woods.

But I dream at night of vegetables. Crates of them. They haunt me. Luscious red tomatoes, green beans, snap-peas, onions bursting into beautiful bulbs beneath the soil. Squash and potatoes. And spinach, of course, which is the one thing I've managed to grow with more than modest success.

I'm not entirely certain I can articulate the reason for this passionate vegetable lunacy. Certainly there isn't just one. The obsession seems to eddy in a confluence of various ideas rushing in from various points of the compass — always subject to tweaking or simply rejecting after a test drive — about how we should be living on this planet. It has something to do with making more and using less, and shaping our decisions with a bias for action and a drive for increasing self-reliance.

It is a cousin to the drive that informs my desire to hunt, and fish, and to harvest with dignity the planet's myriad gifts. And there's this: It's just fun.

To be clear, I'm trying desperately to stay in the

middle of the road on most things. But, if I'm being honest, I have to watch myself carefully. Thus far, we aren't sandbagging a bunker or building a Faraday cage to protect ourselves from a rogue EMP bomb. Maybe we should be, but we aren't. We have not yet laid in a three-year supply of freeze-dried rations for the big collapse of civilization. I do not go in for chemtrails, conspiracies whose only supporting evidence is the abject lack of evidence, or believe the NSA is listening to my phone calls. Above all, I adamantly reject the idea that politicians — any of them — are ever going to provide the finest solutions to our collective cultural frictions.

Also, I'd like to believe this growing preoccupation or, rather, extreme conviction, isn't the manifestation of a dreamy "back to the earth" fantasy I've acquired somewhere.

It's just this: a healthy crop of vegetables has come somehow to symbolize, for me at least, a kind of outrigger in the chop and froth of the daily news, a bulwark against physical dependency, and a spiritual hedge against

the synthetic, the digital, and the ephemeral.

Rick Bass once wrote of his own kind of activism in the Yaak Valley of Montana: "The older I get the more I realize that all of my goals have been possessed of the crime of moderation. Even the largest of my dreams and ambitions, I realize with increasing dismay, were puny, measly, compared to the object of my dreaming."

I'm guilty of that, too, and too often when — if I had only flexed out of the tendency toward moderation — I might have changed an outcome for the better. Maybe, to some extent, we are all guilty of it in various ways.

And so this year, in a redoubled commitment to growing food — something that I still believe matters a great deal — I'm going to toss moderation. I'm going to become a maniac for melons, a loon for legumes. I'm going to farm our little plot like an angry, slightly deranged monk. I'm going to be completely unreasonable, shamelessly ambitious, and indulge the duplicitous luxury of thinking — if only for a minute — that our lives actually do depend on it.

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