



Plants come from places. Every ornamental plant or food crop is descended from some wild ancestor, growing somewhere in the world, attuned to its local climate and soils. When plants are moved beyond their home range and planted in our own home town, this creates all sorts of problems. If its home range is very different than our own, we have to partially recreate the plant's native conditions. Most food crops which were cultivated in North America prior to the arrival of Europeans, including corn, beans, squash, and peppers originated in the high hills of central Mexico. Regardless of whether they are old varieties or new, when we grow these plants in our own gardens we have to make them feel at home. If the plant is not grown in Mexico, a little bit of Mexico must be brought to the plant on the Oregon coast, this means clearing brush, providing plenty of sunlight, fertilizing the soil, and avoiding frosts. Without constant human help, these crops could never grow on the upper left coast. But with enough imported soil, artificial light, temperature controls, and other environmental modifications, you could grow tomatoes commercially on the surface of the moon. Or even in Canada.

When plants are moved between dissimilar environments without these artificial improvements, there are problems. People who have moved from one place to another in a hurry have learned this lesson the hard way. The Cajuns originated centuries ago from French settlers in eastern Canada, the British, viewing this French population as a security risk deported them en masse to the French territories of Louisiana. When living in Canada, these ancestral Cajuns had been productive agriculturalists, growing crops suited to the frigid temperatures and glacial soils of that region. Forcibly relocated into subtropical swamps, the food plants they brought with them promptly died, the Cajuns were sent scrambling into the forests and bayous to forage for food. This explains in large part why Cajun cuisine includes so few vegetables and so many invertebrates, reptiles, and amphibians. The same general process was at work when pilgrims were bailed out by local Native Americans on the east coast. This is why your Thanksgiving meal contains very few Old World foods, and looks vaguely like a sampler plate of the more palatable staple plant and animal foods of the Native Americans of eastern North America. (Among the many things to be thankful for this season is that Native Americans were there to turn white folk on to these foods, and that they were not, like the Cajuns, forced to rely on invertebrates, reptiles, and amphibians.)

Thanksgiving dinner might have become an altogether different experience, a time of gathering with one's friends and family to consume crayfish and frog parts. On the upper left coast, such meals are quite popular among raccoons. However, they would probably not fly as human holiday fare.)

When the earliest settlers moved to the coastal Northwest, the same environmental winnowing, of crop plants took place. This preceded the creation of hybrid crops, and most crop plants introduced from other parts of North America failed amidst the coast's leached soils, dense forests, and wet wet weather. By harvest time, green tomatoes rotted on the vine; half-formed wheat kernels mildewed on the stalk. Only potatoes thrived - a crop from the high Andes of South America, potatoes were suited to the coast's cool temperatures and drizzle like few other crop plants. While natural factors shaped north coast settlers, diets, cultural factors were important too: settlers tended to be prudish in their use of unfamiliar foods, and resisted consuming large quantities of local berries and shellfish until their situations became dire. Thus, the native peoples of this coast had enjoyed an abundant and diverse diet, but white settlers did not. When supply boats were

unavailable, 19th century coastal settlers found themselves limited to a diet consisting almost exclusively of salmon and potatoes.

Complaints about the strict salmon and potato diet appear in north coast settlers, diaries more consistently than any other sort of hassle, I find. This mundane diet was viewed as a serious impediment to white settlement: "No wonder people did not want to settle here where they had to live on salmon and potatoes" Tillamook Bay settler, Warren Vaughn complained, years later. When boats arrived, settlers would purchase as much food as possible, but once these provisions ran out they "had to resort to salmon and potatoes again." PUNCHY from the isolation and drenching rains, these settlers fitfully confronted their spud-centric diet with alternating desperation and humor. Amidst rumors of Tillamook Indian unrest, settlers built barricades, admitting only those people who knew the secret password: "salmon and potatoes." They drank "coffee" made from ground and charred potatoes. When wild storms kept supply boats away for long periods, they began to eat their seed potatoes, knowing that without the next year's potato crop their settlement might ultimately fail altogether. Only the arrival of hybrid crops and better transportation, many years later, brought the north coast's Potato Period to an end. The salmon have declined, still, they are here and they get lots of press coverage. There is little, however, to remind us of this profoundly spud-centric phase in north coast history. We may detect subtle hints of it as we stand in line at the grocery store or behold local musical talent, yet it would be a stretch to call these things "commemorative" in any traditional sense. Perhaps commemoration is warranted. Today, we depend on food which is shipped, abundantly and predictably, from places more suited to agriculture than the upper left coast. This Thanksgiving, you can choose whether you eat the potatoes presented to you, or you leave them sitting there on the plate.

Be thankful.

I think that I shall never see...
by Victoria Stoppello

Our tent appears to be quivering. Quinault lake light glimmers on its surface and on the ancient cedars around us, trees hundreds of feet tall. The campground is quiet. A marbled murrelet pushes a glowing sphere of light before it on the lake surface, leaving a streak to aft, now breaking into a series of glowing marbles, now a streak again. The mountains on the south shore are an outline of curvaceous lumps, coated with forest. Old growth trees form ragged patches above their younger neighbors.

My companions are in awe of the big trees here and I am re-appreciating them. I grew up with trees like these, often on log trucks. My stepfather was a gyppo logger, with his brother and father, a Swedish immigrant. During the fifties Carl, however, left an ancient grove near Olney. He had bought a section and logged all the alder and second growth, but near the farmhouse and beyond the orchard was a gully full of giants, only big trees, oxalis carpeting the ground, truly a late succession forest. Not enough light reached the soil to allow any underbrush. Those were the kind of trees Carl's father found on arriving fifty years earlier; those were the kind of trees the nineteenth century loggers believed would never end.

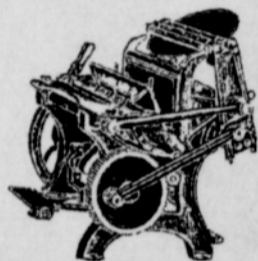
Those were the first spectacular trees I remember seeing, and I also remember the reverence with which Carl brought us to walk among them. Later in life I experienced other magnificent trees: the redwoods of course, including the silliness of driving through a living specimen in a car; kauri trees in New Zealand, a few remnants left, ramrod straight, their kin logged for ship masts and lumber; and bristle cone pines, eking out an existence in a place summer never seems to reach. Little grows at their feet, a high altitude desert where the quiet is eerie, only the wind moving through the pines' gnarled branches. The bristle cones have suffered the ignominy of having one of their oldest members felled in order to count its rings, to determine that it had been the oldest living thing known at the time.

There are giant tulip poplars and beeches in the Joyce Kilmer Reserve in North Carolina, the bald cypress in Four Hole Swamp in South Carolina. These were old growth spared by their logger-owners. Like Carl, they saw something beyond profit in those big old trees. Now those groves are tourist attractions, especially for easterners and Europeans who have long since lost their forests to logging, industry, and tree farms.

Much later I sought out Carl's wonderful grove on that old farmstead near Olney. They've been stumps now for twenty years or more. Someone else, more rapacious than Carl, with less sensitivity to the mystery, beauty, and history of the woods, took them. Made a lot of money from them. Felt they owned them, had "the right of disposal," a principle of western civilization that separates us from the indigenous peoples of this continent.

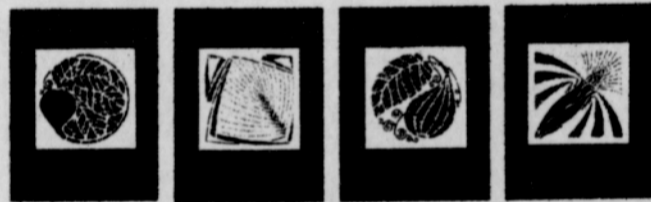
My half sister inherited 45 acres of second growth woodlands from her father Carl who had inherited them from his uncle Joe. She's trying not to log those trees, now 77 years old, in order that her sons will have some big old trees when they're old themselves. This in spite of a divorce that strains her financial limits. That was interesting, too, to have the courts evaluate the forest only on the basis of its potential board feet of lumber. Nothing about the beauty, quiet, protection for the spring, habitat for deer and pileated woodpeckers, or hiding places for playing kids.

Usually the ones who voluntarily save forests are persons with great wealth, who we believe can "afford" to do it. But it's all a matter of degree. I can't "afford" a Mercedes, but does that mean I can't afford a car? Some who can afford to save a patch of forest, cut it all and then express their philanthropy some other way, like Simon Benson and his water fountains in downtown Portland. However, philanthropy of any kind is becoming rare, and we live in a time when water fountains are commonplace but low elevation old growth forests are not.



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