



Since I work at home a lot of the time I frequently eat lunch there. Lunch usually means salad, and many of the components come from my own garden. For the past three years I've been recording, month-by-month, what goes from the garden into my salads. Picking garden greens for lunch on a nearly daily basis, all year round, turns out to be one of the real pleasures of having a vegetable garden, and I probably eat salad more often because of it.

The ingredients have also become more various. I'm far more likely to try something different in a salad if it's right there, catching my eye. You don't need much of something to make a minor addition to a salad for one person, or even two. Stealing a few leaves or shoot tips from pea and fava plants, for instance, won't compromise their productivity. And the best use for a few pea pods or one or two tiny, first-of-the-season zucchini squash is to put them in a salad.

For much of the year, my entire salad comes from the garden, but there are a few weeks each year when I rely on a base of purchased leaves — usually leaf lettuce in the height of summer. In the depths of winter it's mostly romaine lettuce, escarole or frisee endive. In December and January I like the chewy quality of escarole and the crunch

of romaine. They make a nice contrast to my winter garden staple, which is mache, otherwise known as vit, corn salad or lamb's lettuce.

The vibrant deep-green rosettes of mache have a somewhat soft texture and a distinct but mild flavor, making it a good "background" green. Starting in late November, I add fall-sown arugula and chervil or cilantro leaves, together with a couple of weeds: chickweed and bittercress (*Cardamine oligosperma*). None of these things (unlike lettuce and spinach!) seem to interest the abundant slugs and snails in our yard. Occasionally I'll add kale seedlings or mint leaves.

By February, bittercress rosettes are getting a bit stringy and I am beginning to tire of mache, but by then I can add dandelions, native miner's lettuce (it self-sows around the garden) and chives. By March I am mixing those and a little mache with chopped kale sprouts, French sorrel and spicy wild arugula, otherwise known as Sylvetta. There are also new leaves on my patch of walking onions, and occasional volunteer seedlings of fennel, escarole and lettuce.

April brings peas and pea sprouts, lettuce and fresh arugula. Miners lettuce is still appealing, and there are new leaves on chard and kale. Sometimes I add flowers from chives and viola. Arugula of all kinds will be abundant by

May. Red orach is not particularly tasty, but the color is exciting. Pea shoots, nasturtium leaves, kale and broccoli flowers supply plenty of flavor.

I grow lettuce through spring and early summer, first in bowls (it comes on faster) and then in the ground. Red leafed lettuce seems to hold up best in heat — and oddly enough it seems to be the most cold-resistant, too. Wild arugula, which is perennial, grows fast in summer. I allow some to flower for the bees and for a future crop, but I also shear a patch back from time to time and give it a liquid feed to bring on new foliage. Nasturtium, borage and squash flowers are available all summer and, of course, there's fruit. Blueberries in June and July, tomatoes by late July or August, and then, in a cooperative year, figs.

Chopped celery stems and young leaves (from starts planted out in May), sorrel and volunteer orach all continue through September, as does wild purslane with its succulent, crunchy leaves. By then I am sowing mache, lettuce, radish, escarole, kale and arugula — the annual kind — most of which I will feast on in October and November.

Mache, chervil, cilantro and arugula are all extraordinarily hardy. In 2013, you will remember, a near-record freeze in early December played havoc with winter vegetable gardens, but unprotected mache and arugula survived and lasted into February. As early as mid-January I noted that both were making steady growth, and I was also eating chervil, chickweed and the tips of Austrian pea.

Mache can become a bit of a weed, but it is easy to hoe off where you don't want it. Remember to let some go to seed for sowing it in late August and September.

Chickweed is a useful ground cover in winter, but it may be best not to let it get established in all your beds if you are a fan of winter salads. It makes a great ground cover for over-wintering brassicas but it will outgrow and smother small winter greens like mache and chervil. ■

Rachel Foster of Eugene is a writer and garden consultant. She can be reached at rfoster@efn.org

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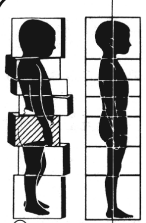
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