

Gratitude: a Third Harvest
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This season was year three in the project of small scale farming in my hilltown home with my husband, Tadd. This was a challenging year in farming and gardening with so much water and rot with some crops a total loss. And yet, we had some things that wouldn't stop producing. Tadd has declared that he will not eat another green bean until next summer. We ate approximately 20 gallons between July and October, and he is done. I think I will be ready again soon, and have one last gallon saved in the freezer. My beets and corn did better than ever, our peppers were amazing, and our parsnips are huge. The tomatoes did okay, but struggled and we didn't get to freeze any, which was a real bummer. While the squash did fine, given all the damp, it was not as prolific as last year. We moved some things around for crop rotation, but next year, I think I am going back to the last year's plot plan, because the potatoes seem to love the cruddy rocky soil in the back of the garden and were super lame in the extra composted beautiful soil on the west end. Now we know. Our bug management was the best so far this year, with more ladybugs set loose in the garden, and more physical removal, along with water traps around the perimeter. I gave the cabbage to the slugs, after trying twice without a single leaf, and the cantaloupe turned to moldy mush, but in the grand scheme of things, it was a solid year, and we continue to learn a lot.

2021 has been a particularly hard year in our family, and almost always, on days when I spent time in the garden, I would build a little more resilience and feel a lift. I tried to sneak more short periods of time out in the garden, fifteen minutes here, fifteen there to keep things weeded and to move around in between zoom meetings. Last year was all about saving food, to fill a need for security in the face of uncertainty. This year, my garden ethos was to eat things as they were ready and enjoy them in the moment. We saved things that are grown to be saved, squash and potatoes, and we froze blueberries, pesto, and kale, but most everything we grew went right in our bellies, and I am living in trust that our local winter farmers will keep us in greens and other veggies this winter.

Last year I wrote the following, and I think it bears repeating:

As I dig in the rocks that are my garden, I often think about the agricultural and political history of where I live. I am in a hilltown, on former farmland, pasture. Most of the woods around me, and there are thousands of acres of them, are abandoned pastures that have grown up in the last hundred years. There are stone walls and stone foundations all over these woods, largely from 1700s farming, when settlers claimed this land from the tribes still living in the area and started building small towns. These hills are not great for farming, the topsoil is full of rocks, and actually where my potatoes are, is literally rock that crumbled in my hands, plus compost. The land down in the Connecticut River Valley, the former Lake Hitchcock, is magnificent for farming, and so in the 1700s it was poorer white folks, who couldn't afford that land, or to be closer to town, who eked out a living in the hills, which is true all down the Appalachian Mountain chain. But of course, that living was eked out on the backs of the folks from whom the land was taken, and funded by an economy fueled by slave labor. So as I crumble the rocks into dirt and plant my potatoes, I think about those hill folk, and how scared they must have been each year

as they planted *their* potatoes. And I think about the people who hunted on this land for a thousand generations before that. I am grateful for my patch of rock.

Gratitude as a practice is about changing our internal world, our own mind and heart—reframing our experience. It is a practice to change ourselves, not others. It can help us consider a situation with new eyes, and to know ourselves better, to help us examine why we do what we do and listen to our inner voice. Gratitude can be a filter through which we frame our experience and a theological tool for considering how we will respond to stressful situations, how we will make choices, how we will live our lives. Gratitude is not a function of how much we have or do not have, but a recognition of how connected we are to *all* that is, to our collective past, present, and future. Ralph Waldo Emerson is said to have written (though I can't find it in any of his published works), "Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude."¹

Sometimes, it is easier than others to stop and pay attention to things for which I am grateful. Sometimes I get overwhelmed by the enormity of injustice and suffering in the world. When that happens, I turn to what I have practiced. I find one thing, no matter how small, that I am grateful for. And just as important, I go outside and do something with my body. I can feel the change in my mind and body from where I am at the beginning of a walk, and the end, and what the impact is on my mood when I work in the garden. When I stick my fingers in the dirt, I remember that there is hope and beauty in simple things, and the responsibility I have for this land that I am living on, my accountability in the present to remember the history of this place. If I want to live my values, if I want to remain hopeful for a new path, and be ready to work for systemic change, then, this practice is a way for me to get there. What is yours?

As Thanksgiving approaches, I encourage us all to take time to consider all that has happened to create the food we eat every day. The challenges of living through a pandemic are sometimes existential, and sometimes practical, and all are present in our experience of food. In every way, but particularly through food, we are connected to people we will never meet. And in each meal, we are invited to remember those connections to one another, to our history, and to our earth. To practice gratitude is not to pretend everything is okay when it is not, but to find those moments, those parts of experience that connect us to the transcendent, awake to the miracle of the universe, and us in it. That responsibility and wonder can be scary sometimes, and that is why we have each other. The practice of gratitude helps us remember our connections, regain perspective, honor our relationships, our interdependence, check our privilege and assumptions, and to navigate better through suffering and hard times.

Happy Thanksgiving and so may it be. Amen

¹ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/14132-cultivate-the-habit-of-being-grateful-for-every-good-thing>. I cannot find a citation for this anywhere. I don't believe it comes from his body of written work, and perhaps is a quotation printed in someone else's text? It does not appear on this page of all his collected works: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/emerson/>