

Be Thankful for food and all the rest...

After the feast is reduced to delectable leftovers, the table leaves put away, and the bouquet of late asters, purple beautyberries and other gleanings gone home with a guest, the conversation drifts to other years. We may speak of food that was memorably great or really awful, but most memories are of the people who shared it with us. More than a meal, thanksgiving is treasured as our own American holy day and perhaps the other side of the coin of thankfulness is responsibility. We need to think about the choices we are making and not drift along on autopilot.

Recently two things focused my interest in the potential for locally grown produce. One was the arrival of the 2009 seed catalog from Pinetree Gardens (delicious) and the other was my lunch. The egg was native to Gloucester County but the English muffin, while not English, was baked in Ontario, Canada and the orange came from South Africa. So much for my carbon footprint! A carbon footprint is what we each personally add to global warming.

Trade is important, essential, and healthy but only when it is moderated by what is best for the common good AND the planet. As for shopping: it is hard enough to match coupons with your list, find what you need on longer aisles amid more fluid displays without reading the small print. This effort is being made easier in England. Products in English stores will soon be displaying a label resembling a carbon footprint showing numbers that signify the negative impact the production of that item has 'cost' the environment.

This labeling should boost the sales of things made closer to the home market. Small England with its short growing season has always been a major importer from both close neighbors and the wide world. It is significant that England has become seriously aware of the impact of global warming since impulsiveness doesn't seem a strong component of their stalwart national character, does it? There have to be serious concerns prompting this attention to their carbon footprint.

The labeling process will provide a field day for math whizzes and techo-geeks, even if it confuses the rest of us. But in any event, climate change is both a given and a call to action. We can survive a recession: we can't survive the degradation of the environment.

WHAT TO DO NOW

Even if some of your outdoor plants look bedraggled and in need of care, don't feed or water them. They should be encouraged to go dormant. If the ground is not frozen and you are not averse to pattering in the cold, you can divide the perennials that have outgrown their spots.

This is also a good time to repair a low spot in your lawn. Using a sharp spade, slice out a section of turf and fill in the depression with good soil. Don't slice close to the

surface or you will cut away too many roots. Cut a slab at least two inches thick so those roots will have a fighting chance. When you have patched it, don't ignore it, but make sure it does not dry out.

HOLIDAY DÉCOR SUGGESTIONS

Don't deck the halls to the detriment of the evergreens in your landscape. Prune judiciously so your shrubs won't greet spring with a bad haircut. Some shrubs such as Chinese holly are such exuberant growers their shiny foliage needs a trim, as do the Burford hollies. If you have designs for a grape vine wreath, it is permissible to prune your grape vines ahead of 'late winter'. To make the vines more pliant, they may be soaked in water overnight. When woven into a fairly compact circle they are practically indestructible, ideal for the children to tie their tiny art projects on. Even better, they will last forever in a child's room without moldering into dust.

Gift plants are a mixed blessing. You will be wildly successful enhancing their beauty if you keep your house at a moist 60 degrees. As well as keeping it out of sunlight and moist, a flowering chrysanthemum is happiest at 68 degrees daytimes and 40 to 55 degrees at night. Evidently you should put it out with the cat.

Poinsettias are easier to please: they prefer a constant temperature between 60 and 70 as if they had been programmed by the power company. In fact, they languish over 75 degrees or under 60. They can be kept attractive for months if allowed to dry between waterings but not dry out. In indoor plant culture, the term "dry" means the potting soil is no longer wet to the touch. It does not mean hard, bone dry as I've learned by killing a few.