

Victory Garden

During World War II, people whose gardening was ordinarily limited to a few flowers in their yards began to cultivate Victory Gardens, both as a patriotic gesture and as a means of supplementing the canned goods rationing stamps. My dad, who was an old unreconstructed farm boy, was delighted to plow the back portion of our backyard and plant lettuce, radishes, carrots, spinach, and onions.

The earth in that part of the yard was black, gummy gumbo but rich. Soon we were all pleased to see the tender first sprouts of what we now considered "our" garden. I went out to inspect its progress when I got home from school and so did my younger sister Ruth. The whole family looked forward to eating the products of our own yard although we didn't all agree that Daddy's plantings of spinach and radishes were well advised. We found the first tender lettuce leaves delicious, despite my mistaken notion that iceberg lettuce in firm heads was the only kind of lettuce. The radishes weren't nearly so well received. Then we had to wait awhile for the other produce. I enjoyed watching the feathery carrot leaves emerge with their promise of tender carrots soon. I was willing to wait forever for the spinach and onions, neither one of which I cared for. I did notice that Ruth, who was about five, was going more frequently to the garden than the rest of us.

One day Daddy said he couldn't understand what was happening to part of the garden. Most of the vegetables were growing well, but the onion crop was sparse and strange looking, with big gaps between the green shoots. At first he thought a rabbit with strange tastes was raiding the onion rows. After we continued missing more and more onions, I was talking to Ruth one day and discovered that my little sister had a very strong onion breath. At first she denied my suggestion that she was the rabbit wreaking havoc in the onion rows. Soon, however, when Daddy came in with the news that all the onions were gone, she confessed that she'd been raiding the garden, eating a tender onion or two - or three - every day. Daddy was so amazed at her enterprise that he only congratulated her on her daily raids, for she had not damaged any of the rest of the garden. I wonder if Ruth still likes little spring onions these many years later.